THE LEAGUE OF EXTRAORDINARY GENTLEMEN

VOLUME II, NUMBER I

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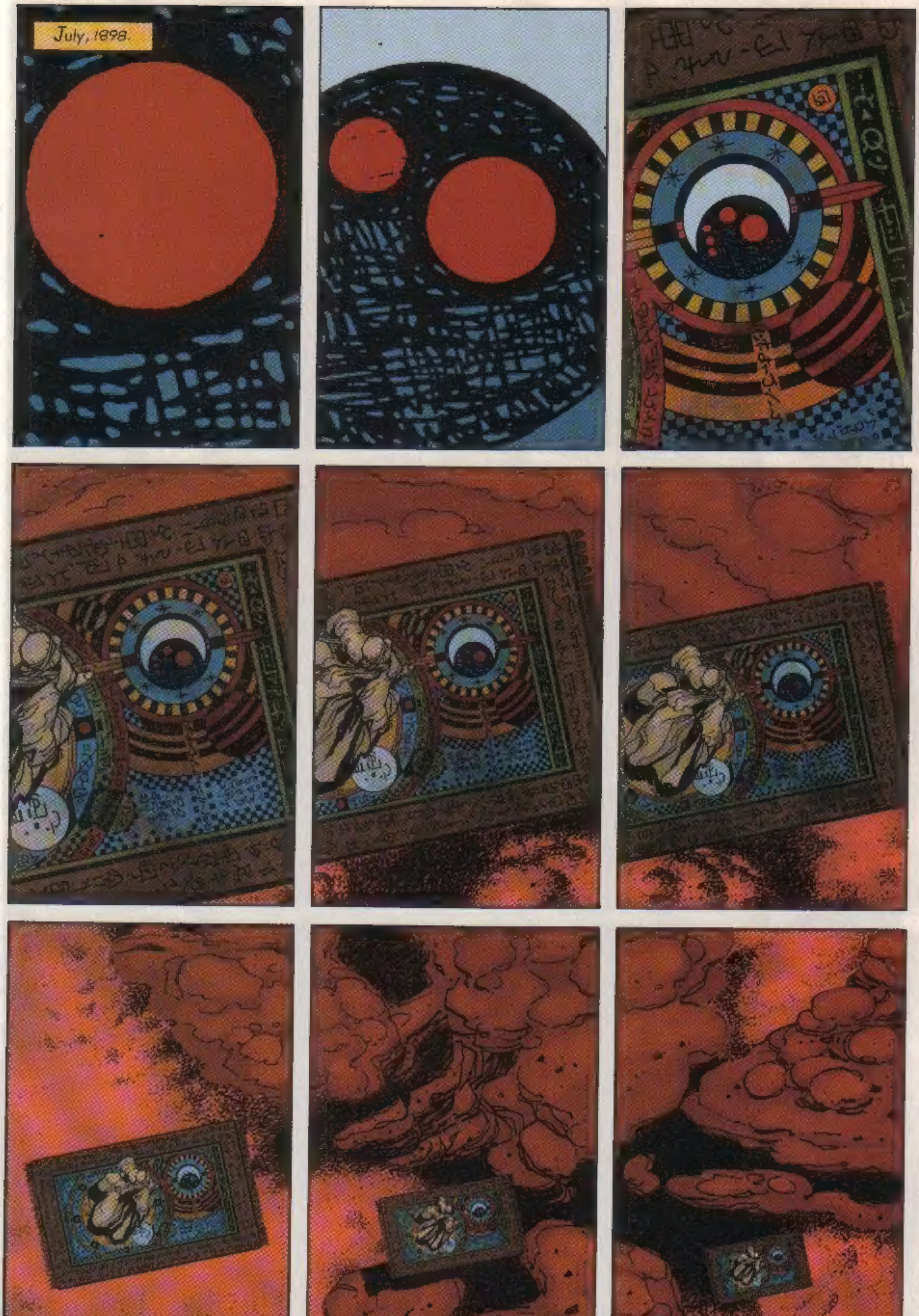
July, 1898.

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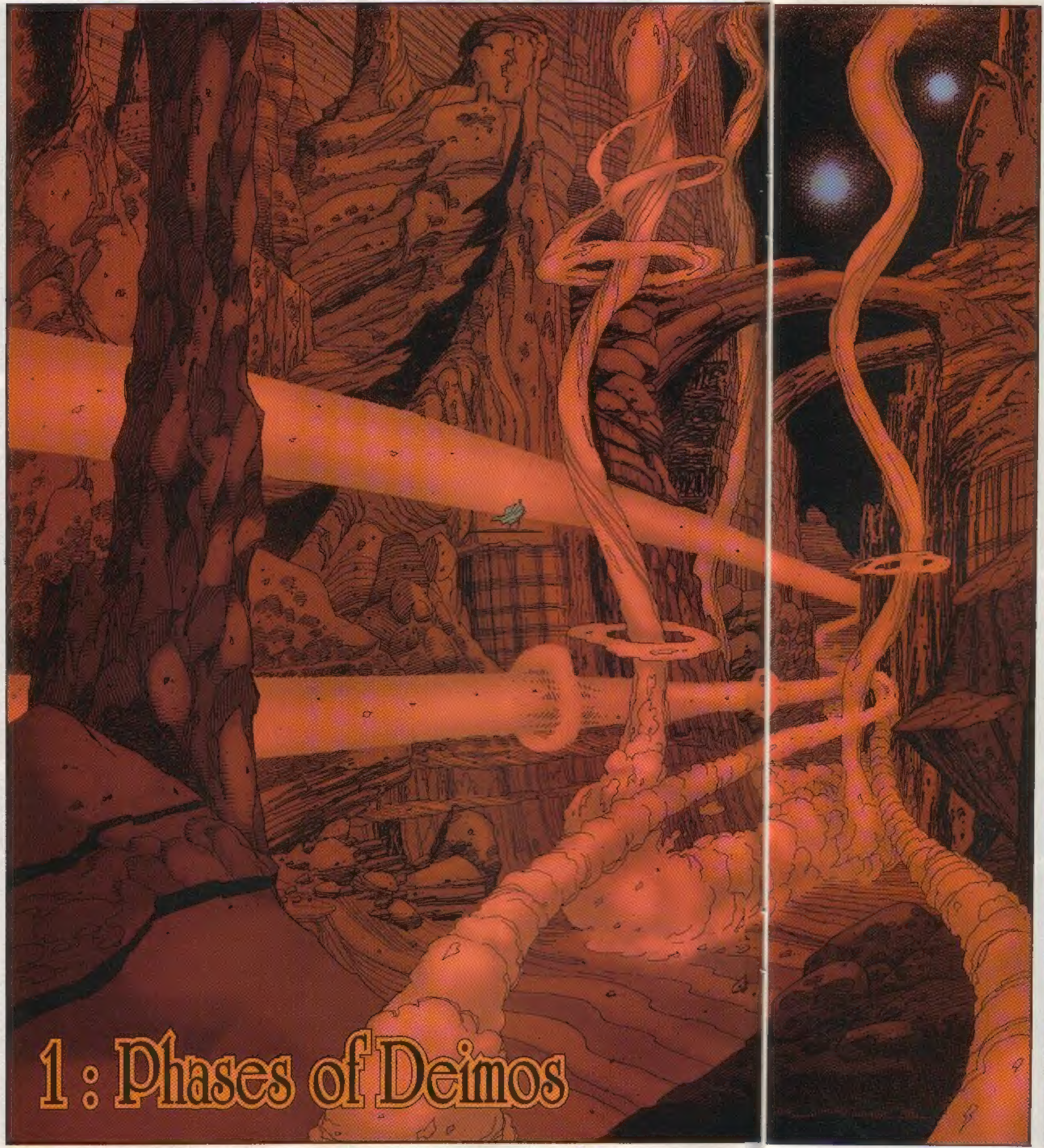
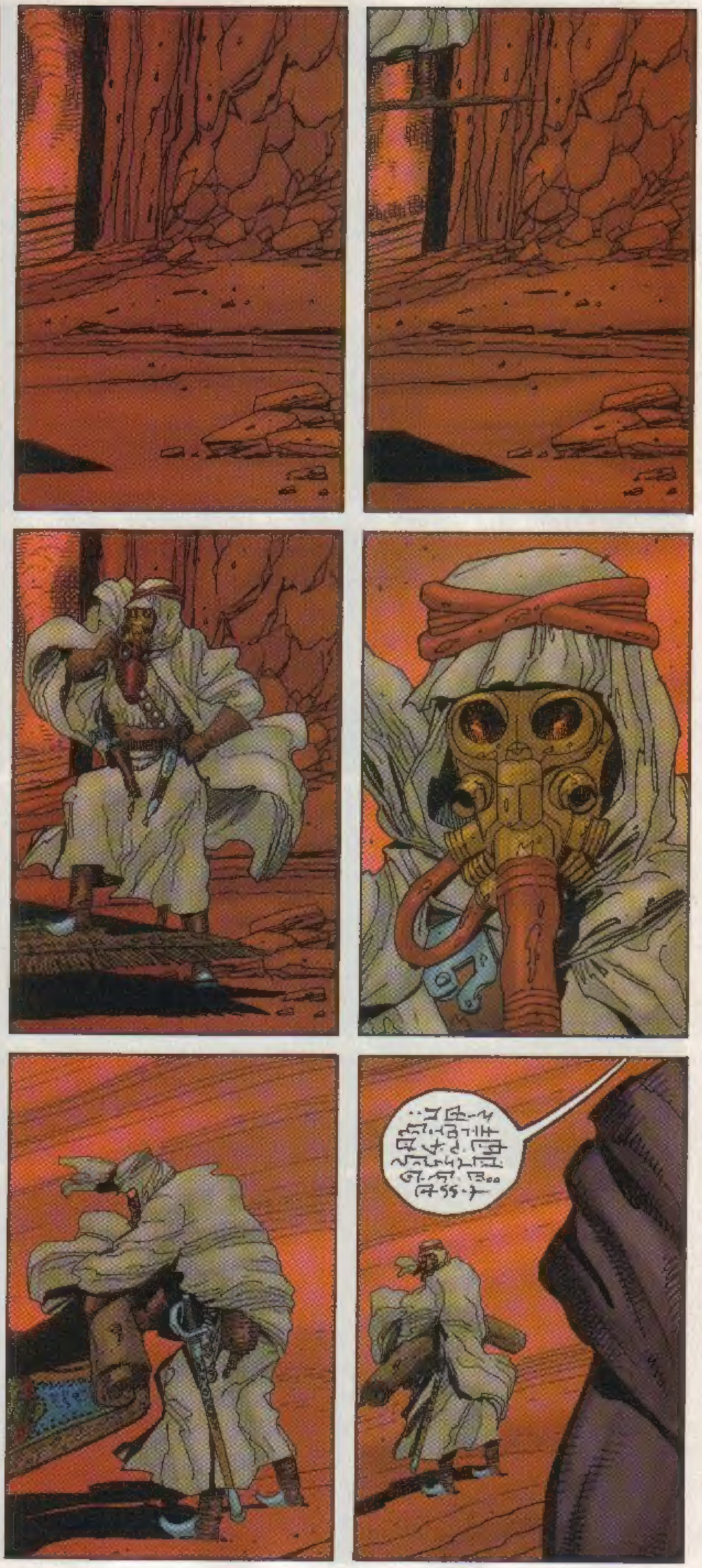
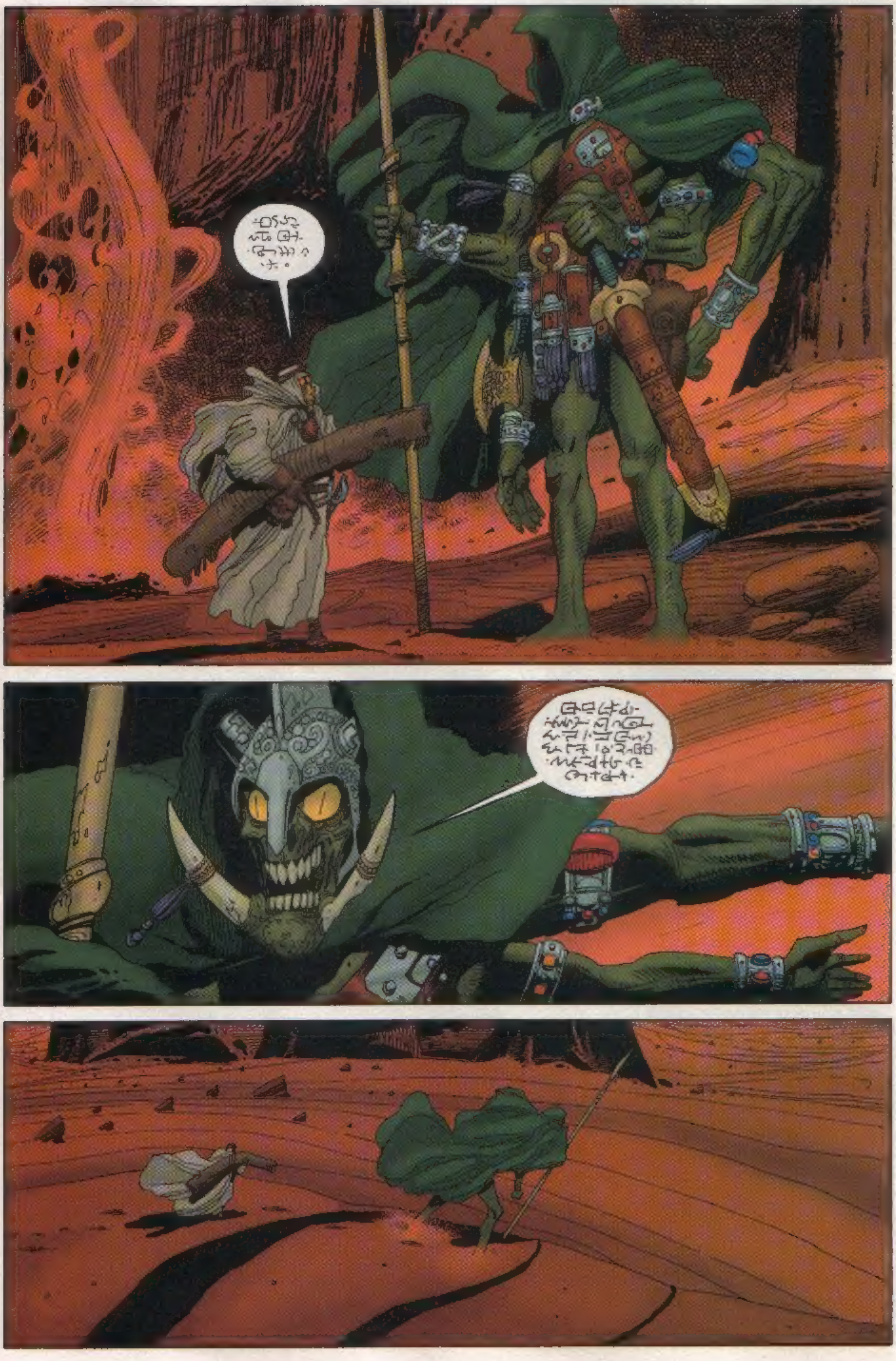
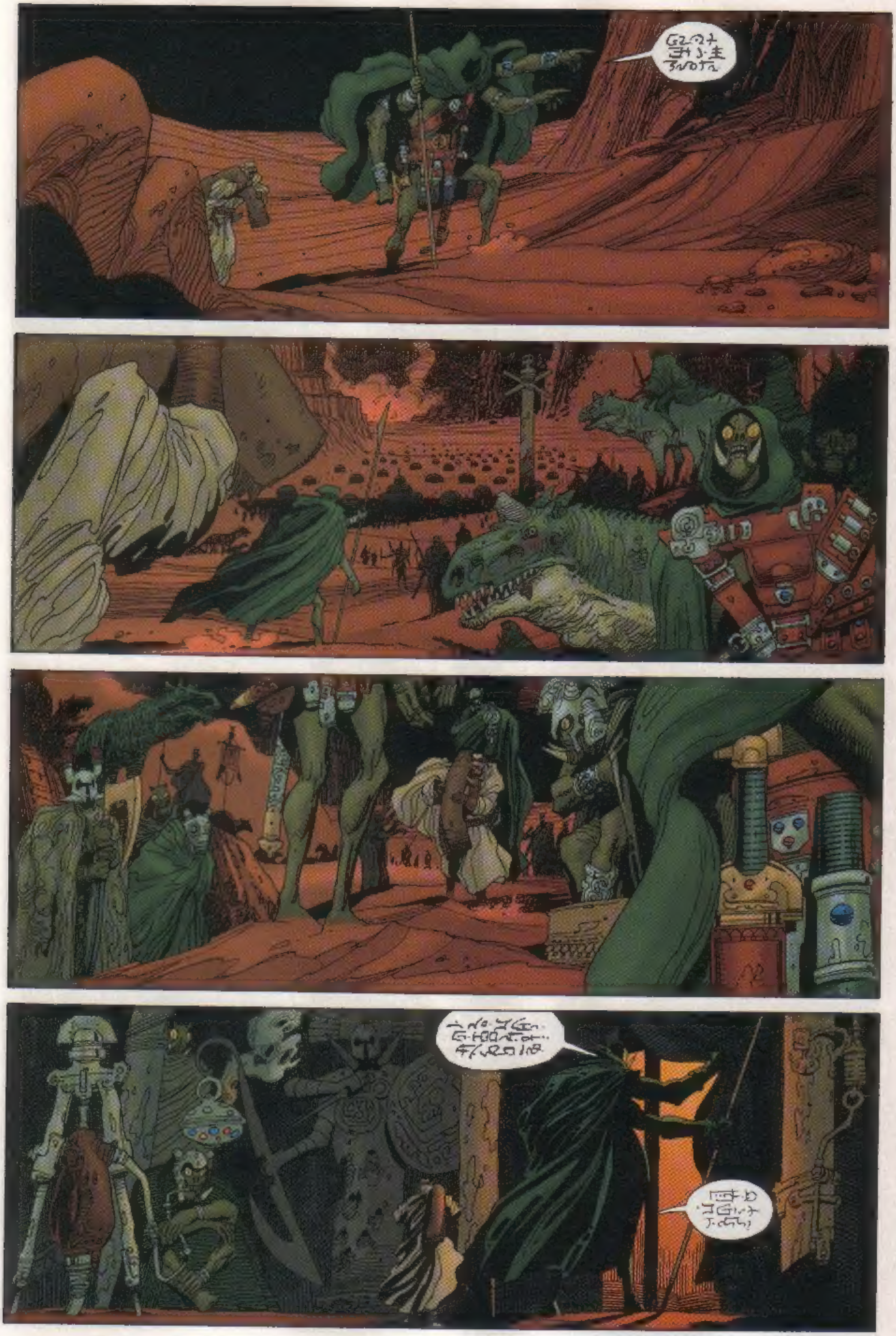
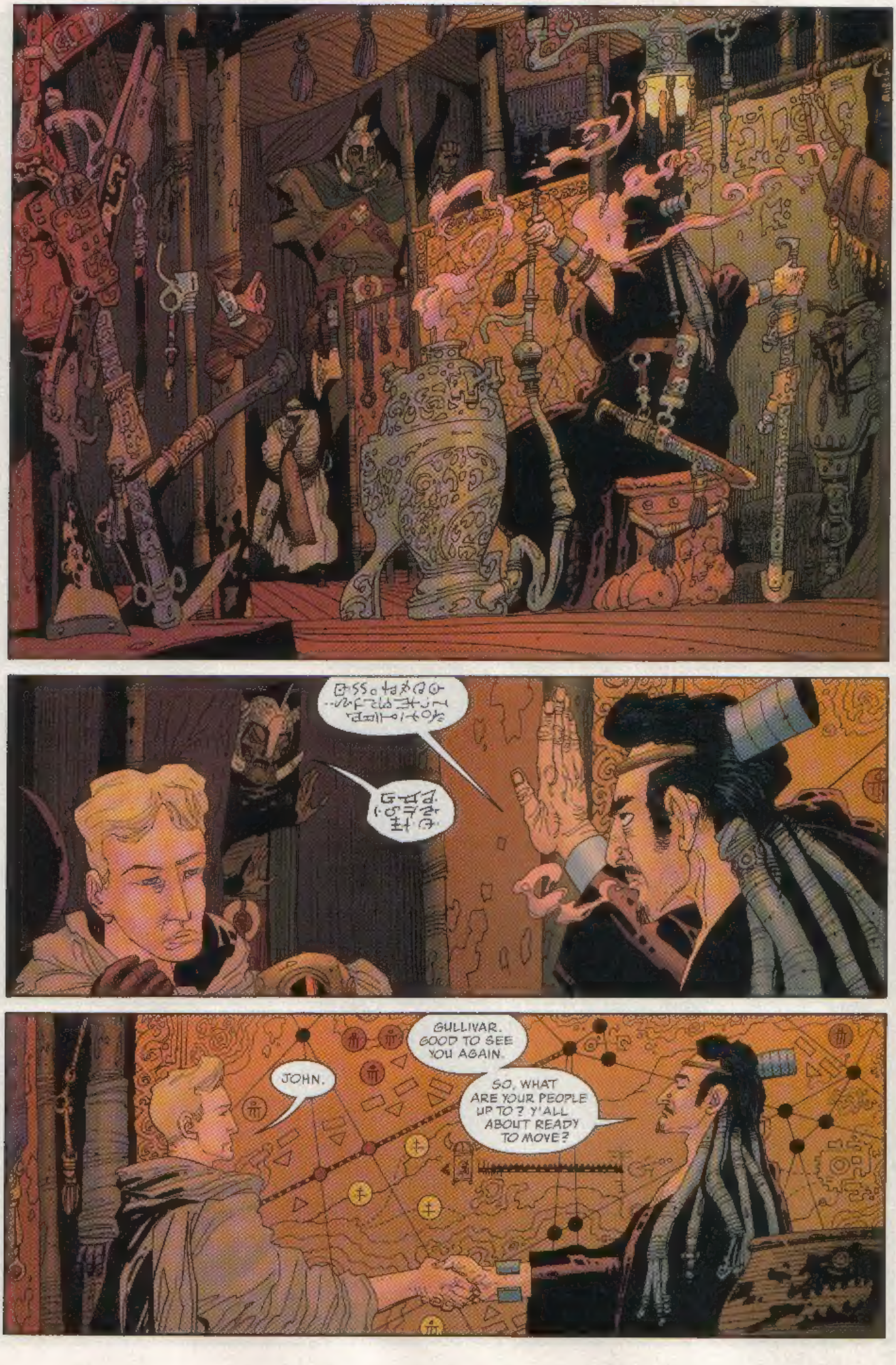
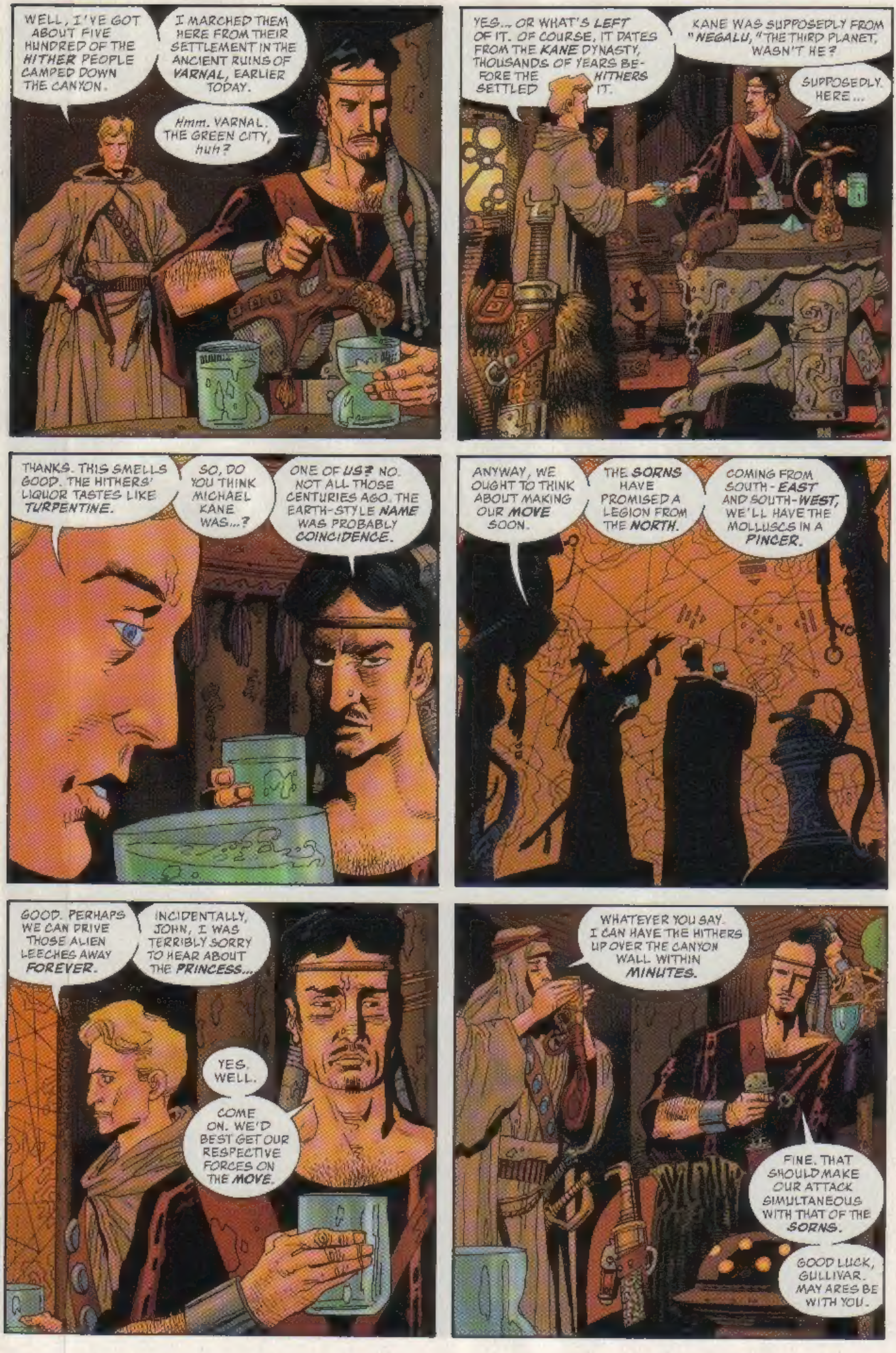


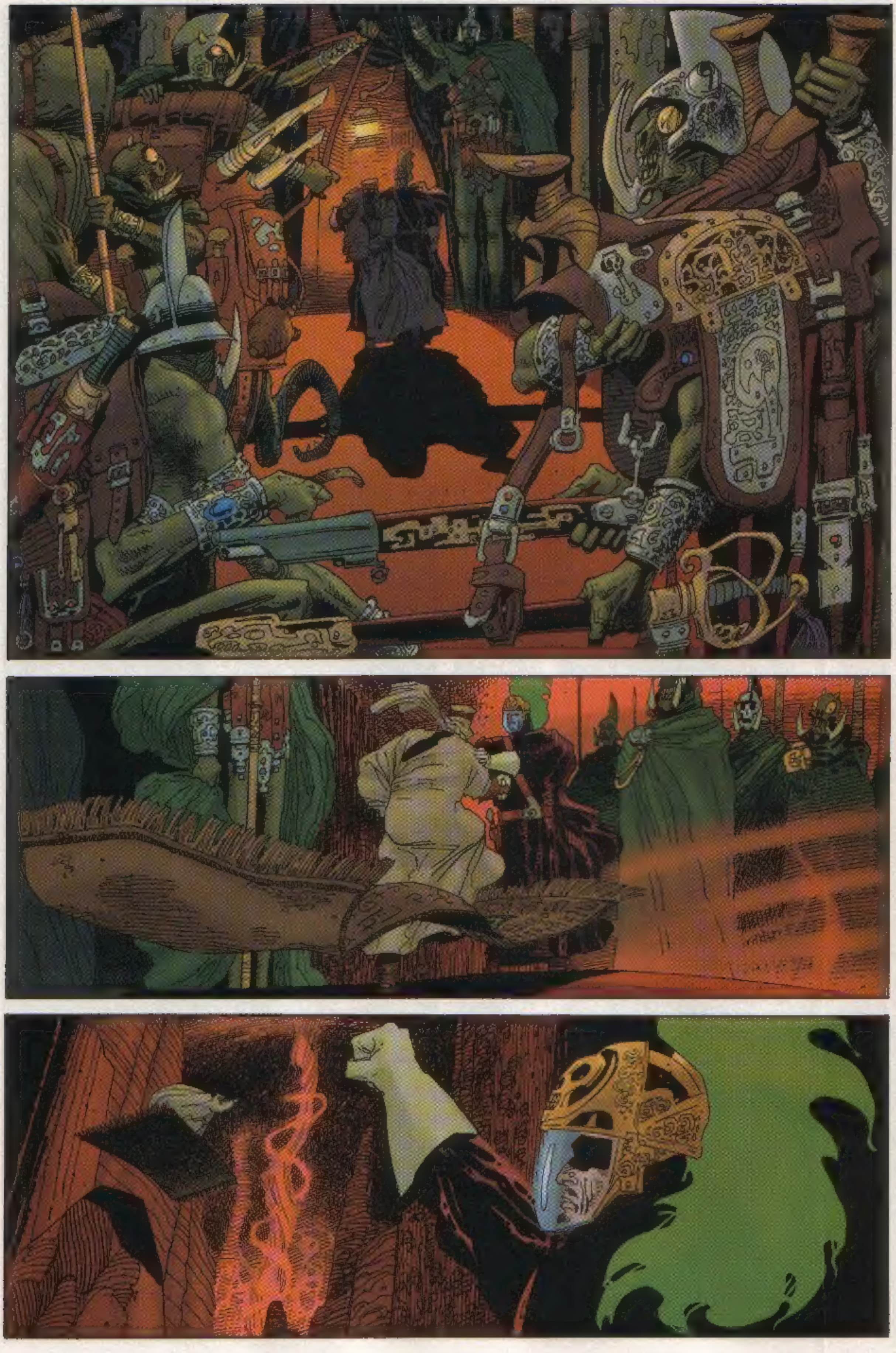


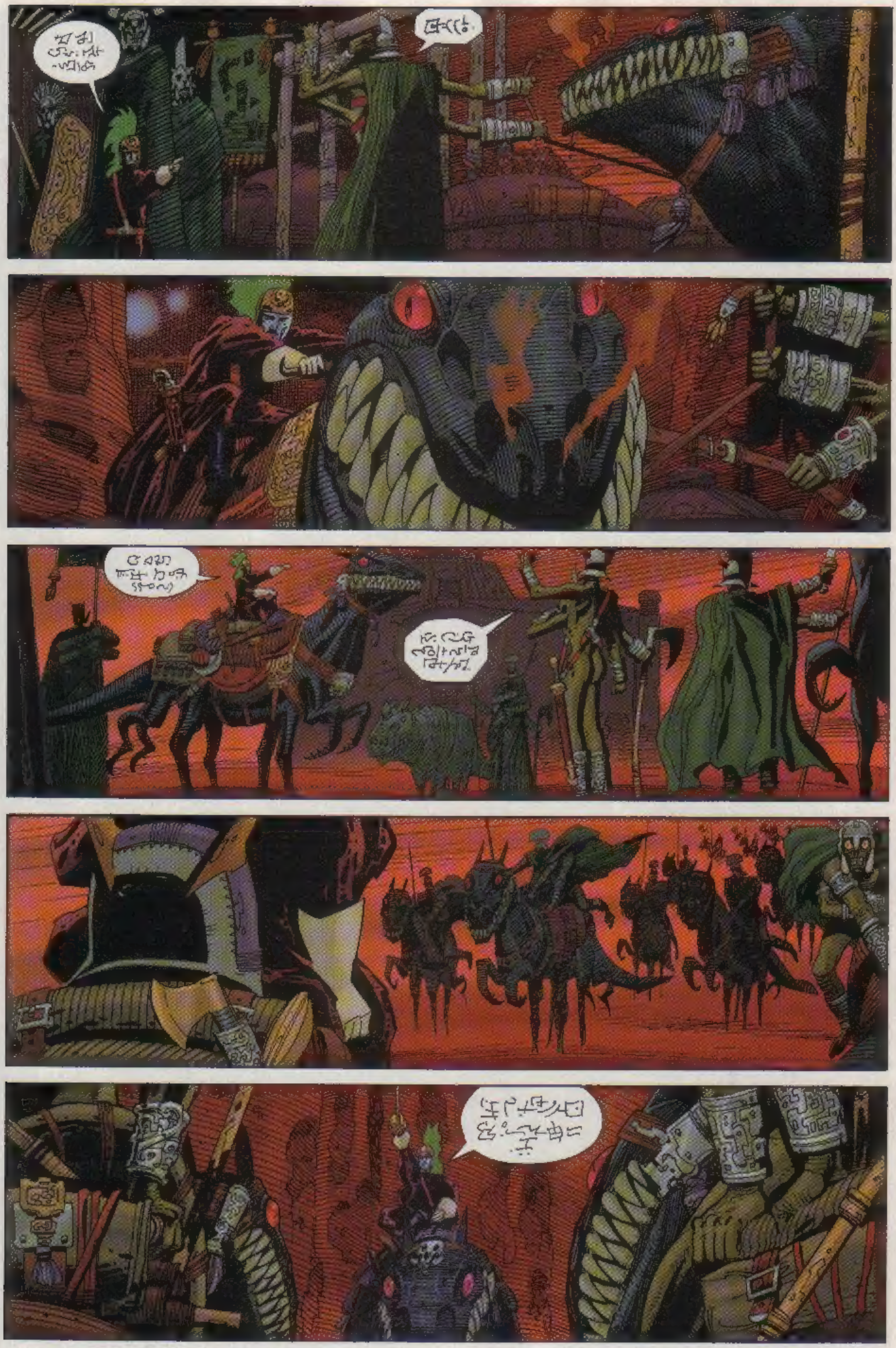


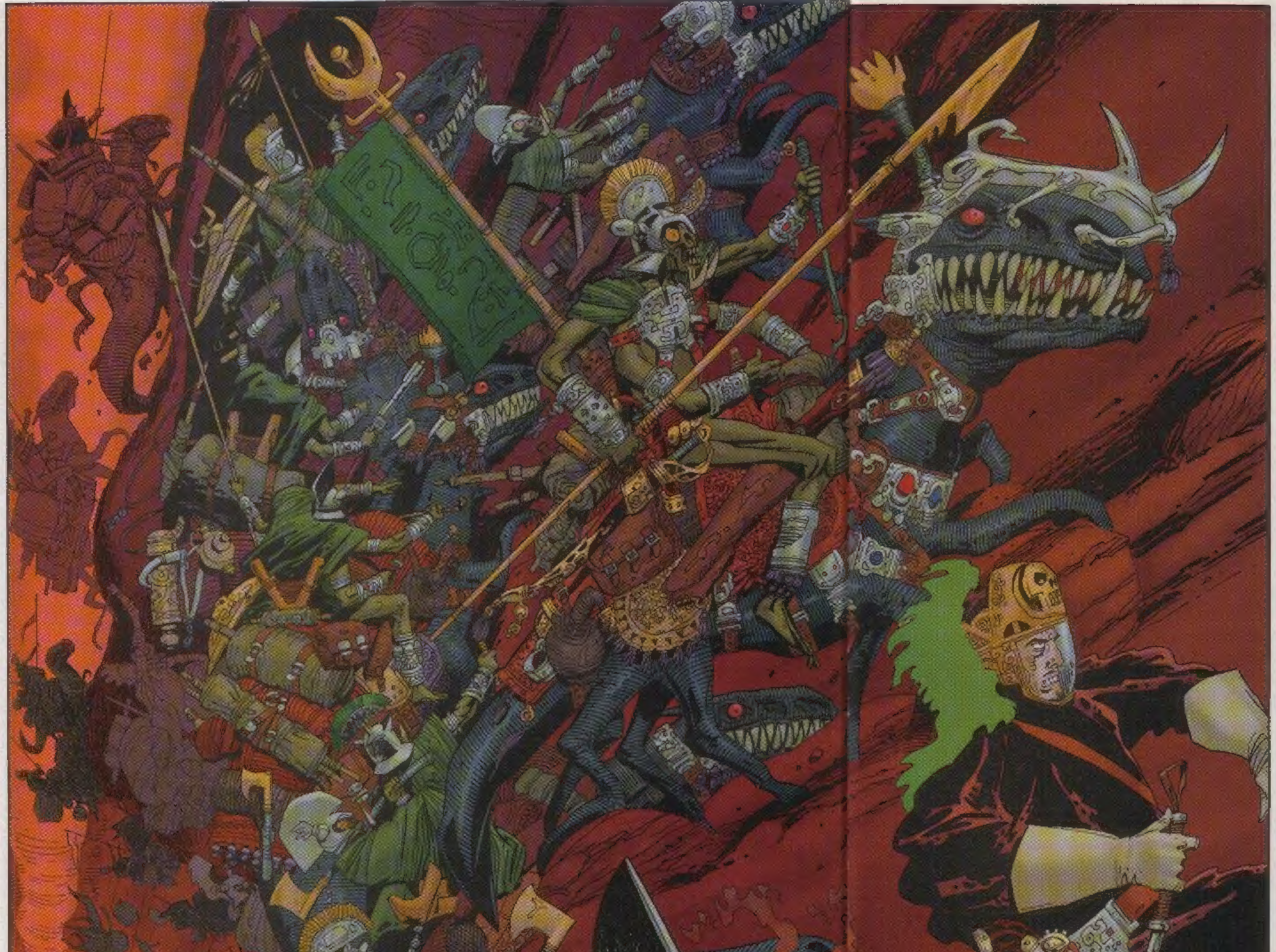


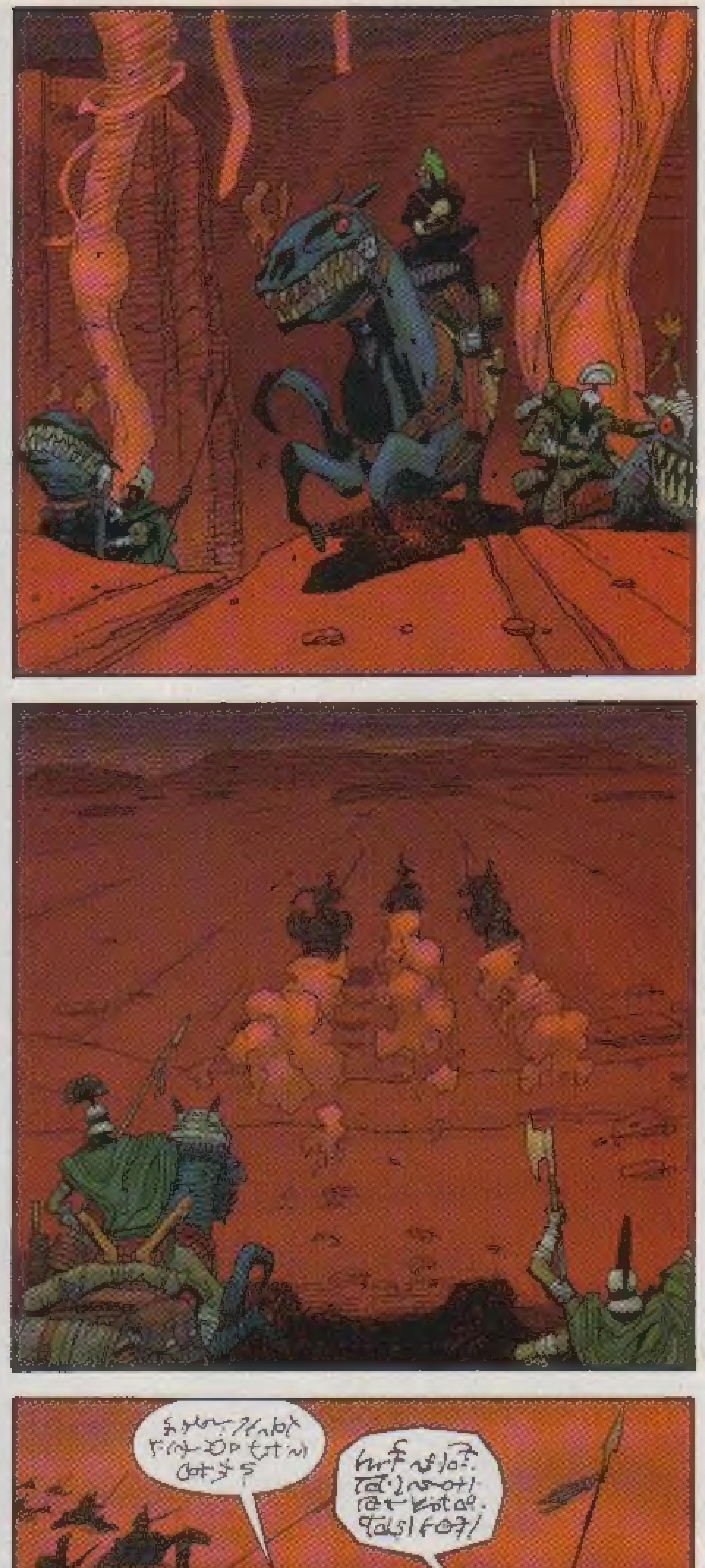

JOHN.
GULLIVAR. GOOD TO SEE YOU AGAIN.
SO, WHAT ARE YOUR PEOPLE UP TO? Y'ALL ABOUT READY TO MOVE?

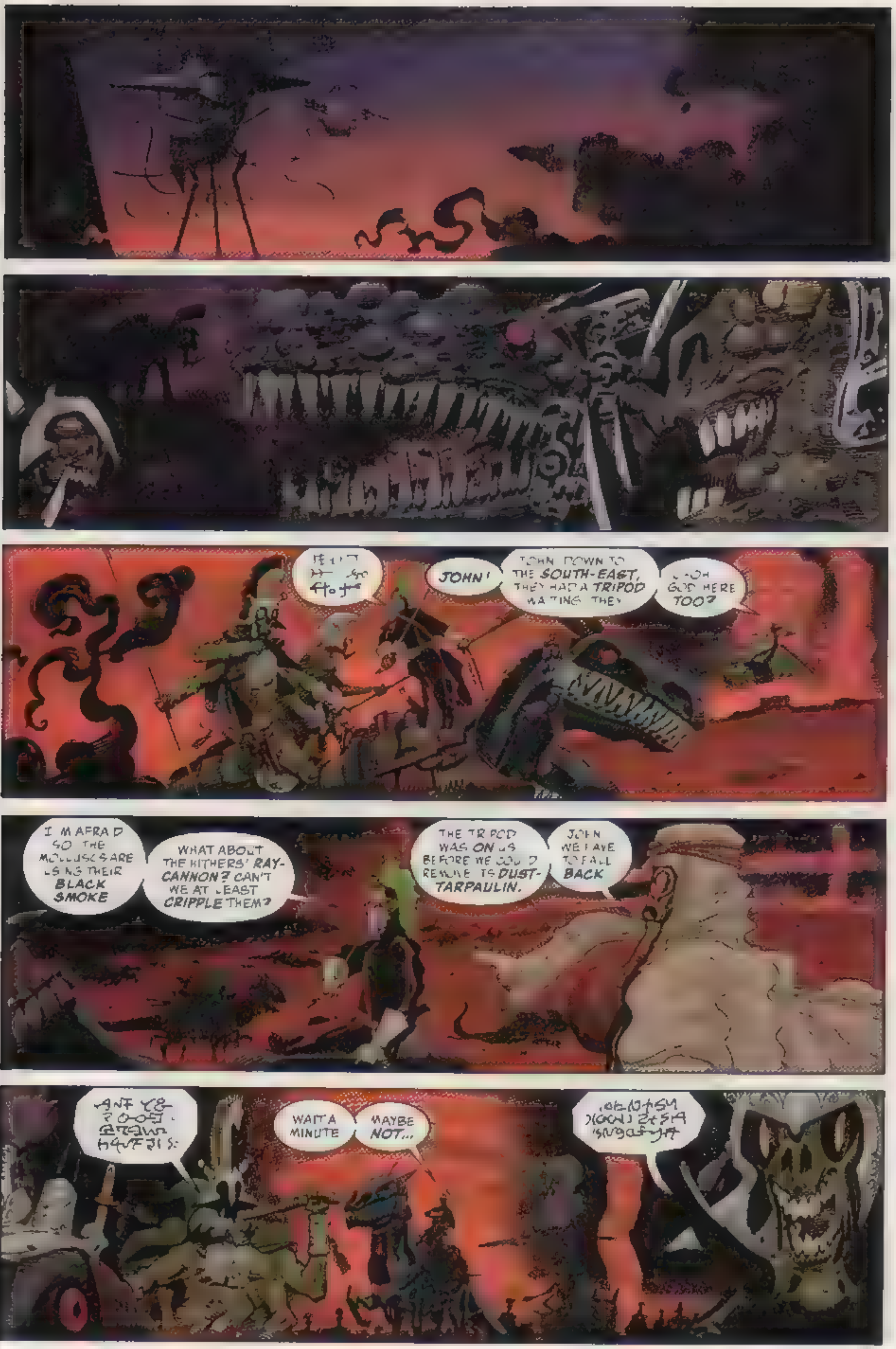

WELL, I'VE GOT ABOUT FIVE HUNDRED OF THE *HITHER* PEOPLE CAMPED DOWN THE CANYON.
I MARCHED THEM HERE FROM THEIR SETTLEMENT IN THE ANCIENT RUINS OF *VARNAL*, EARLIER TODAY.
Hmm. VARNAL. THE GREEN CITY, *huh?*
YES... OR WHAT'S *LEFT* OF IT. OF COURSE, IT DATES FROM THE *KANE* DYNASTY, THOUSANDS OF YEARS BEFORE THE *HITHERS* SETTLED IT.
KANE WAS SUPPOSEDLY FROM "*NEGALU*," "THE THIRD PLANET," WASN'T HE?
SUPPOSEDLY. HERE...
THANKS. THIS SMELLS GOOD. THE HITHERS' LIQUOR TASTES LIKE *TURPENTINE*.
SO, DO YOU THINK MICHAEL KANE WAS...?
ONE OF *US?* NO. NOT ALL THOSE CENTURIES AGO. THE EARTH-STYLE *NAME* WAS PROBABLY *COINCIDENCE*.
ANYWAY, WE OUGHT TO THINK ABOUT MAKING OUR *MOVE* SOON.
THE *SORNS* HAVE PROMISED A LEGION FROM THE *NORTH*.
COMING FROM SOUTH-*EAST* AND SOUTH-*WEST*, WE'LL HAVE THE MOLLUSCS IN A *PINCER*.
GOOD. PERHAPS WE CAN DRIVE THOSE ALIEN LEECHES AWAY *FOREVER*.
INCIDENTALLY, JOHN, I WAS TERRIBLY SORRY TO HEAR ABOUT THE *PRINCESS*...
YES. WELL.
COME ON. WE'D BEST GET OUR RESPECTIVE FORCES ON THE *MOVE*.
WHATEVER YOU SAY. I CAN HAVE THE HITHERS UP OVER THE CANYON WALL WITHIN *MINUTES*.
FINE. THAT SHOULD MAKE OUR ATTACK SIMULTANEOUS WITH THAT OF THE *SORNS*.
GOOD LUCK, GULLIVAR. MAY ARES BE WITH YOU.

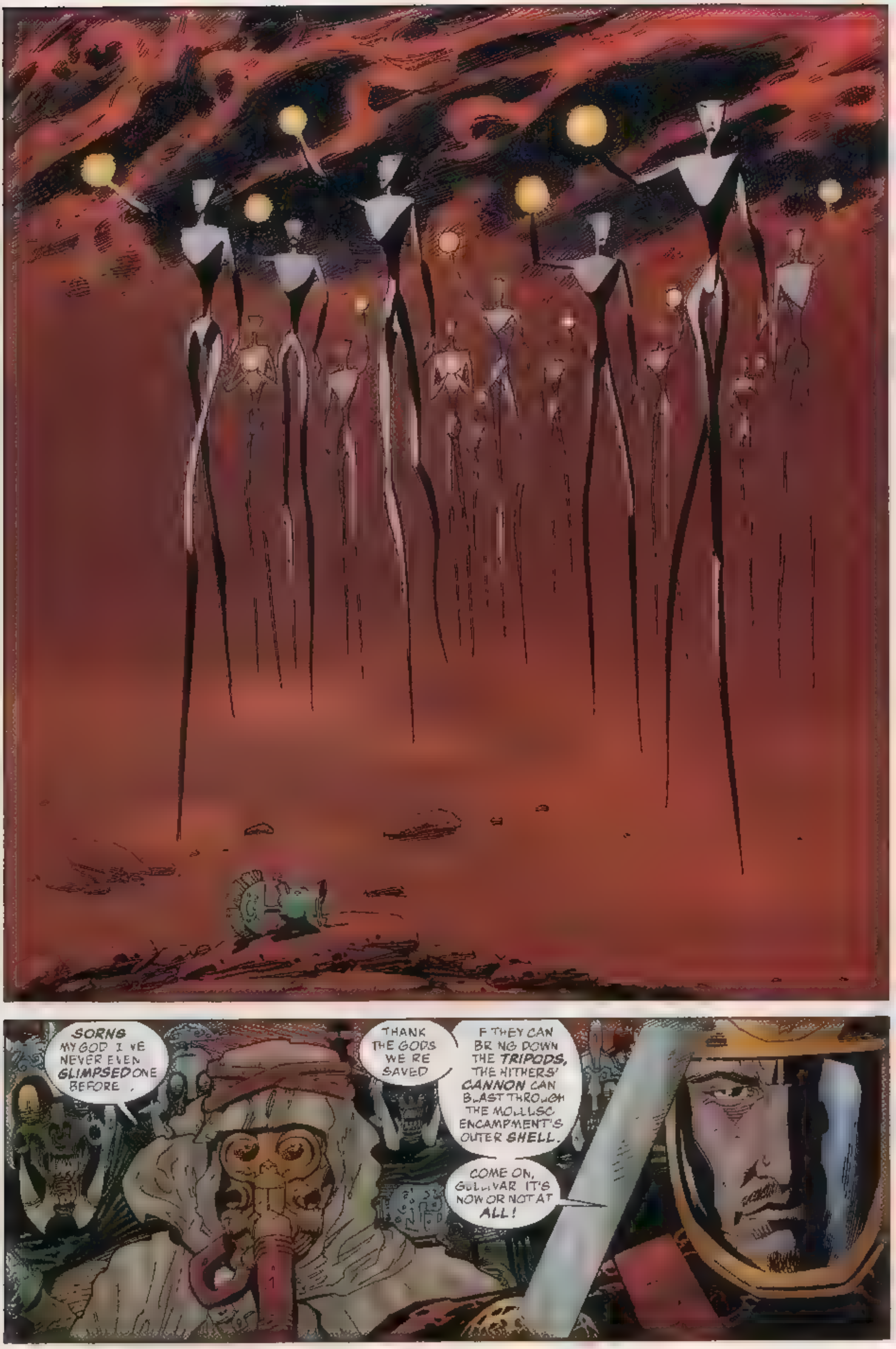


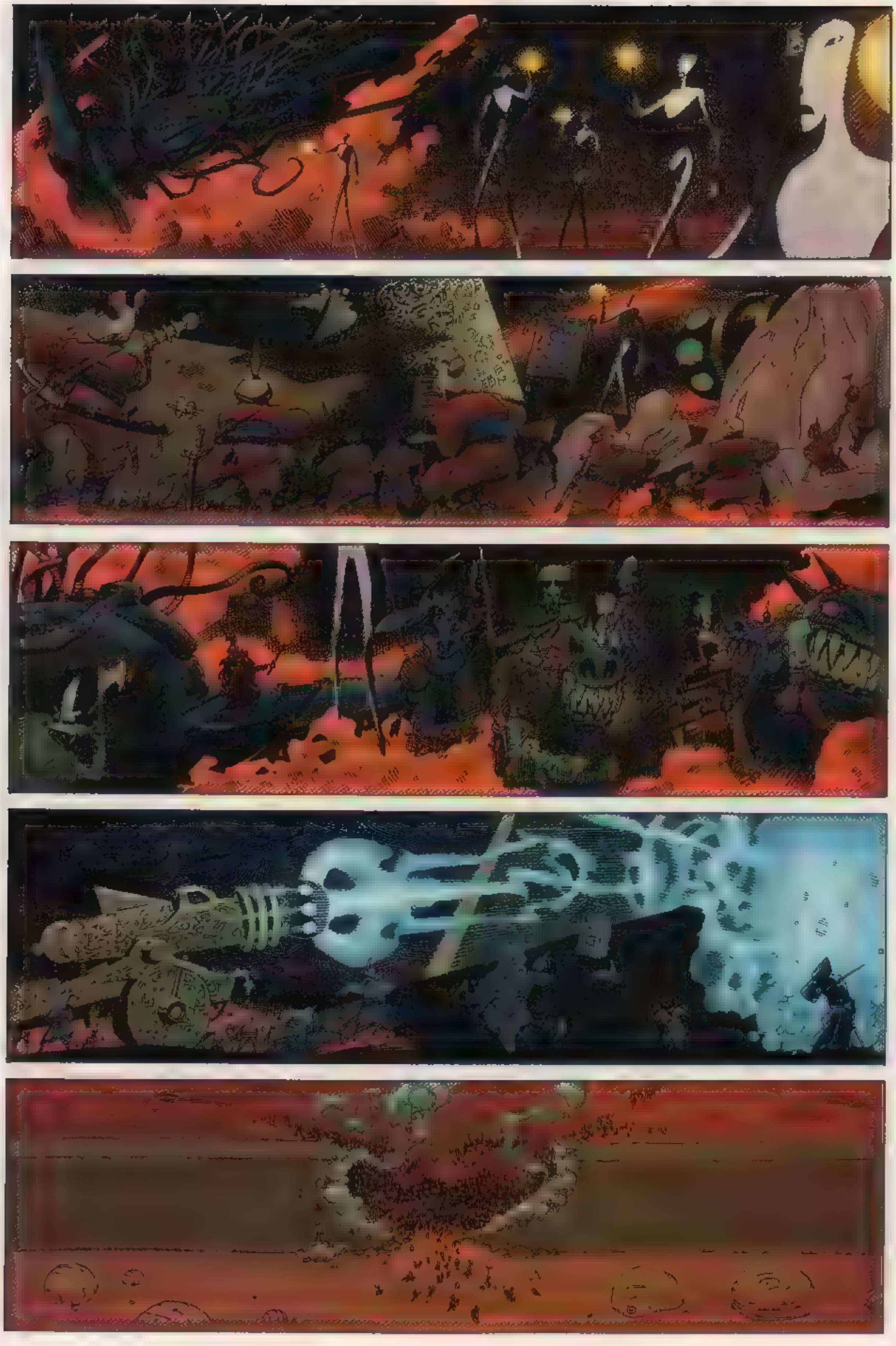




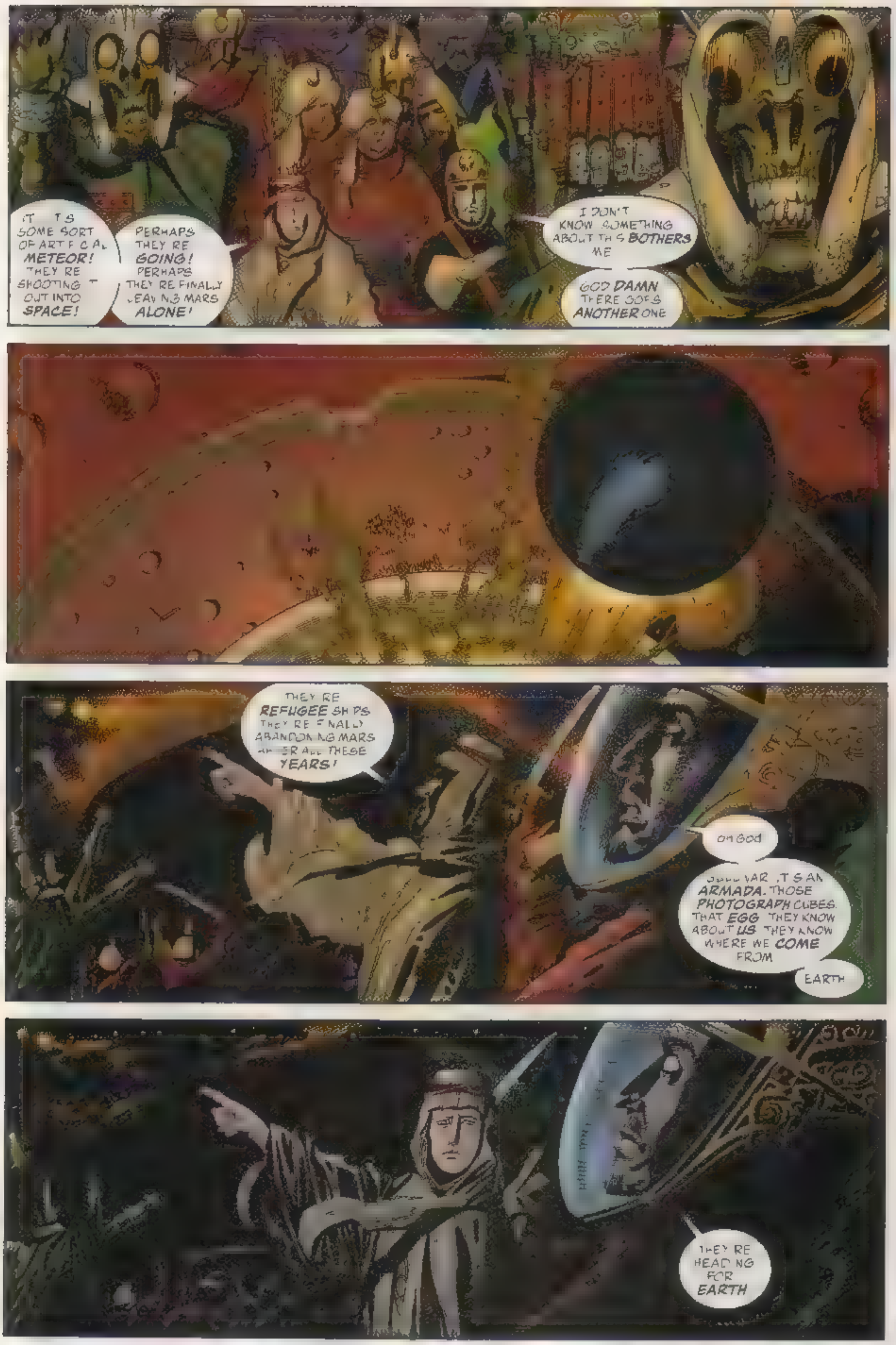


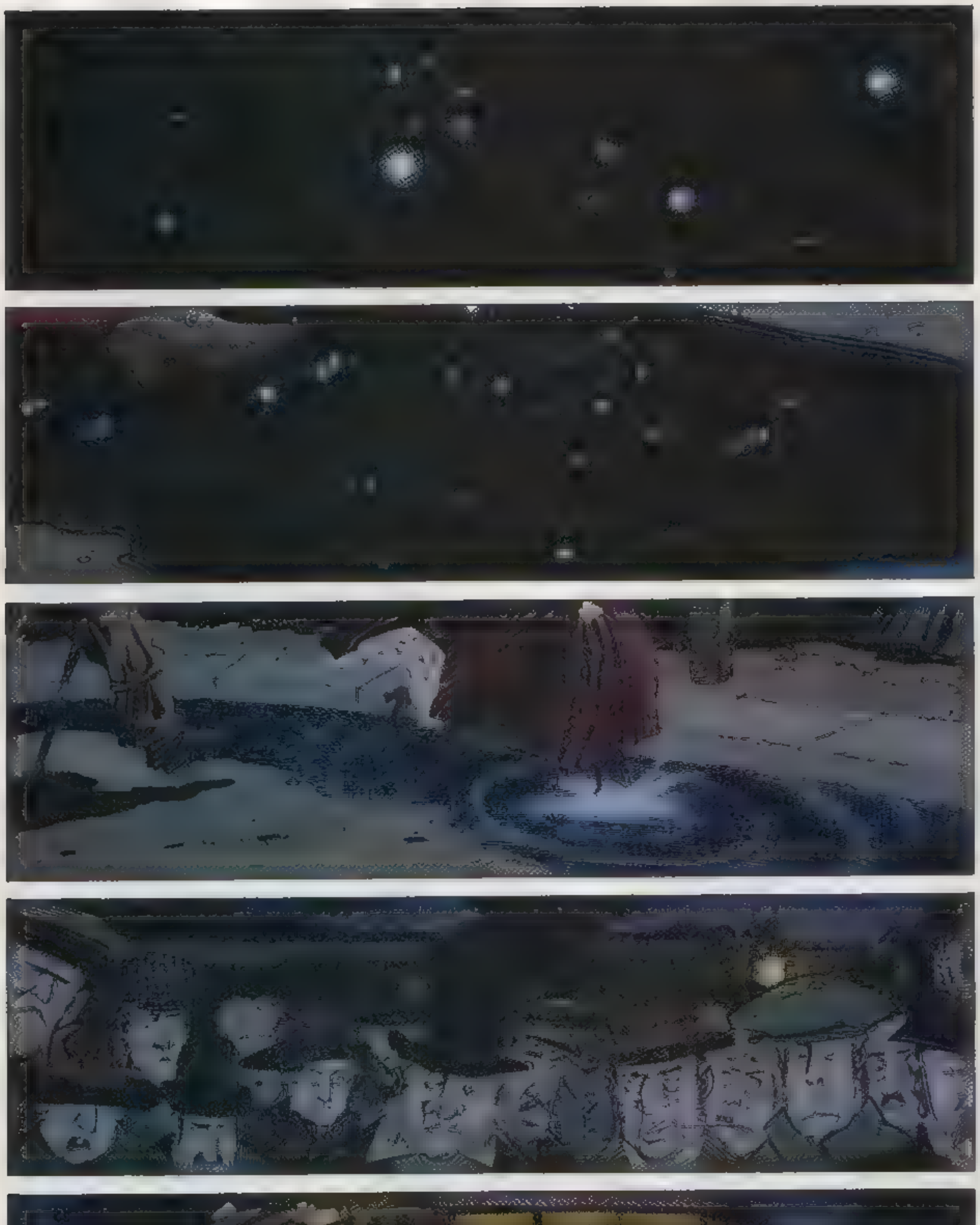

JOHN!
JOHN, DOWN TO THE SOUTH-EAST, THEY HAD A TRIPOD WAITING. THEY
...OH GOD HERE TOO?
I'M AFRAID SO. THE MOLLUSCS ARE USING THEIR BLACK SMOKE.
WHAT ABOUT THE KITHERS' RAY-CANNON? CAN'T WE AT LEAST CRIPPLE THEM?
THE TRIPOD WAS ON US BEFORE WE COULD REMOVE ITS DUST-TARPAULIN.
JOHN WE HAVE TO FALL BACK
WAIT A MINUTE
MAYBE NOT...


SORNS. MY GOD I'VE NEVER EVEN **GLIMPSED** ONE BEFORE.
THANK THE GODS WE'RE SAVED
IF THEY CAN BRING DOWN THE **TRIPODS**, THE HITHERS' **CANNON** CAN BLAST THROUGH THE MOLLUSC ENCAMPMENT'S OUTER **SHELL**.
COME ON, GULLIVAR. IT'S NOW OR NOT AT **ALL!**



DAMN THEIR OUTER RINGS DESERTED... AND THE INNER FORTIFICATIONS ARE STRONGER.
GETTING THROUGH THEM COULD TAKE WEEKS.
NOT ENTIRELY DESERTED. WHAT'S THAT CREATURE OVER THERE, IN A CAGE?
I DON'T KNOW. IT'S,
OH GOD. I THINK IT'S A CAPTURED SORN.
THE MOLLUSCS HAVE PERFORMED FLESH-MECHANICS ON IT. THEY'VE GIVEN IT WINGS..
Ugh WHAT'S OVER HERE?
Hmm POSSIBLY SOME SORT OF CAMPAIGN BUT
THIS BLACK BUILDING MATERIAL. WHAT EXACTLY IS IT?
I'VE HEARD THE MOLLUSCS SECRETE IT THEMSELVES. THEY .
GOOD GOD JOHN. LOOK HERE.
TH-THEY'RE SOME KIND OF PHOTOGRAPH-CUBE BUT THE IMAGES WITHIN..
THERE'S ONE OF ME. AND THERE'S YOU AND THE PRINCESS. A AND THERE'S ONE OF EARTH...
GULLIVAR! OVER HERE!
INCREDIBLE. A GLASS EGG WITH MOVING PICTURES! BUT WHAT IS THAT PLACE? THAT'S NOT AMERICA...
NO. I THINK IT'S SOMEWHERE IN ENGLAND.
WAIT A MINUTE. WHAT'S ?
WHAT'S UP? WHAT DID HE SAY?
HE SAID THERE'S THUNDER COMING FROM BEYOND THE INNER COMPOUND WALLS.
HE SAYS IT SOUNDS LIKE IT COULD BLOW AT ANY MOMENT.


IT... IT'S SOME SORT OF ARTIFICIAL METEOR! THEY'RE SHOOTING IT OUT INTO SPACE!
PERHAPS THEY'RE GOING! PERHAPS THEY'RE FINALLY LEAVING MARS ALONE!
I DON'T KNOW. SOMETHING ABOUT THIS BOTHERS ME.
GOD DAMN. THERE GOES ANOTHER ONE.
THEY'RE REFUGEE SHIPS. THEY'RE FINALLY ABANDONING MARS AFTER ALL THESE YEARS!
OH GOD.
GULLIVAR, IT'S AN ARMADA. THOSE PHOTOGRAPH CUBES. THAT EGG. THEY KNOW ABOUT US. THEY KNOW WHERE WE COME FROM.
EARTH.
THEY'RE HEADING FOR EARTH.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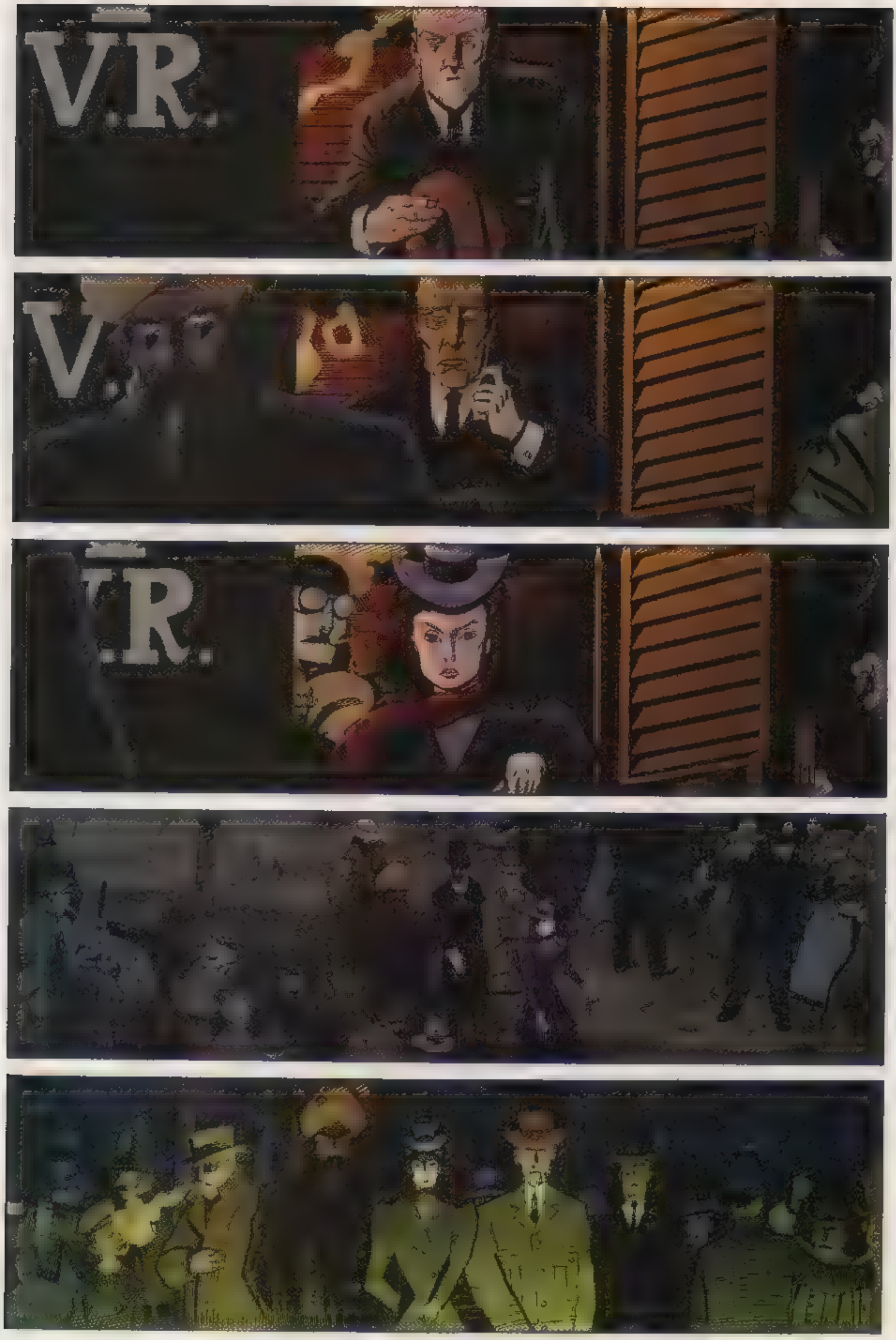
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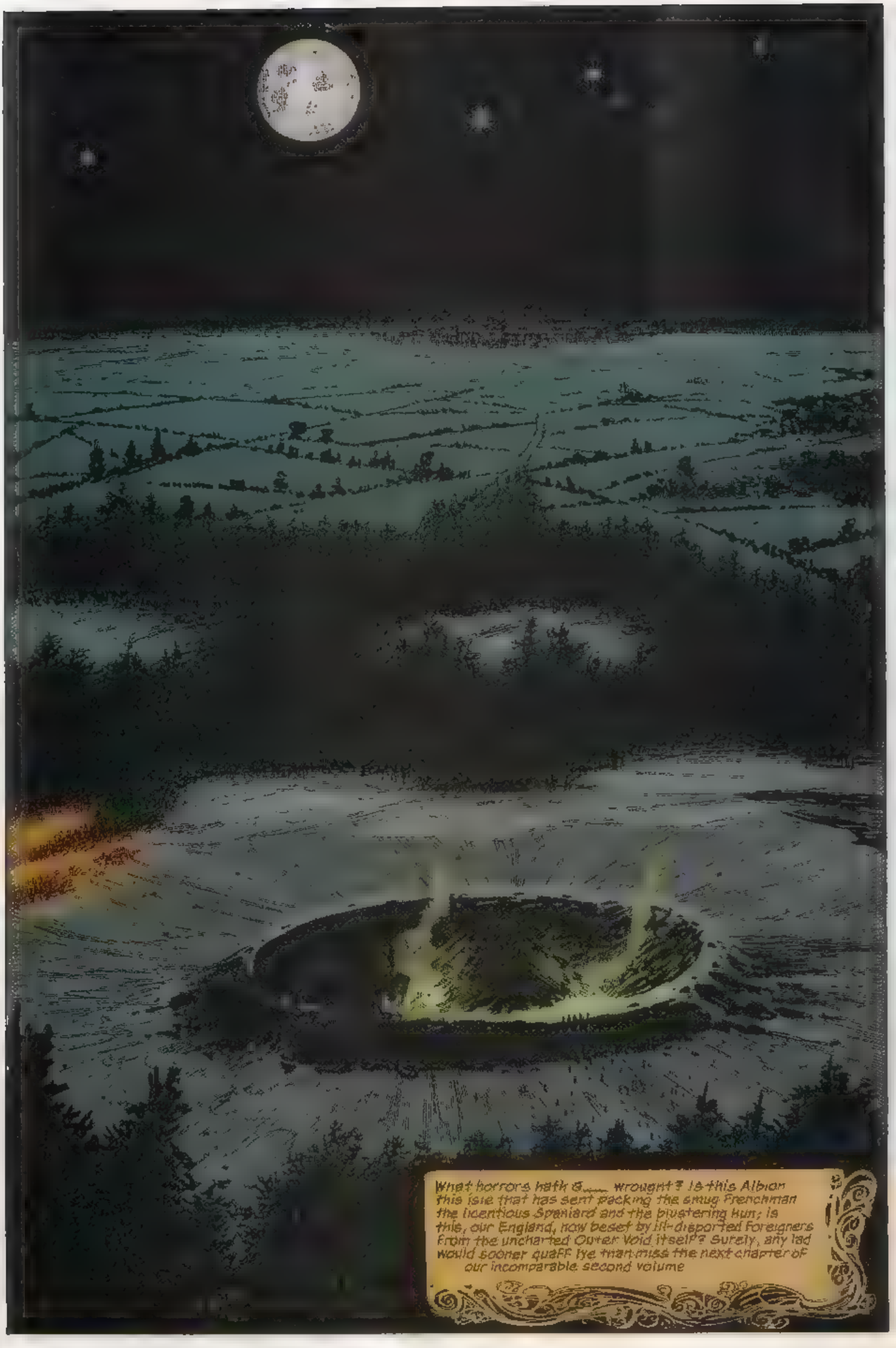

What horrors hath G___ wrought? Is this Albion this isle that has sent packing the smug Frenchman the licentious Spaniard and the blustering hun; is this, our England, now beset by ill-disported Foreigners from the uncharted Outer Void itself? Surely, any lad would sooner quaff lye than miss the next chapter of our incomparable second volume

The New Traveller's

ALMANAC

EDITOR'S PREFACE

We are delighted to make available to our readers a selection of the field reports and travel documents accrued over a period of almost three hundred years by those agents of British Intelligence whose activities are contained in a series of files and ledgers distinguished neither by name nor number, but merely by a solitary question-mark.

About the earliest such gathering of unique individuals in service to the Crown, little is known save that they were reputedly convened during the seventeenth century and were referred to unofficially as "Prospero's Men." Led, apparently, by a Duke of Milan with interests in the occult sciences, the other members of this first ensemble would seem to be shadowy and obscure personages with little evidence confirming their existence save for the material in these files. Two of the group were rumoured to be conjurings of sorcery rather than mortal beings, whilst a late addition to the company, the wide-eyed traveller called only "Christian," claimed that he had wandered into our world from some neighbouring etheric territory, to which he was, by various uncanny means, prevented from returning.

The existence and the implication of such other-worldly realms would come to be the source of an increased concern amongst the British secret service in the centuries that followed Christian's eventual disappearance, as the reader may discover in accounts below of expeditions to the marvellous archipelago known as The Blazing World, or of the fated and disastrous Bellman Expedition into the interior of a puzzling well or pit near Oxford in the 1870s.

The first team was disbanded in the 1690s, after Christian's disappearance. In the eighteenth century that followed there are documents and line engravings to suggest a second group was formed under the management of a seafaring surgeon and adventurer named Lemuel Gulliver. Other members of this new fraternity would seem to have eventually included a mild-mannered clergyman from Kent, a Mr. Bumppo from America, a married English couple called the Blakeneys and a Mistress Hill, who would appear to have been no more than a libertine.

The records of these earlier bands have been here edited together with those notes accumulated by Miss Wilhelmina Murray in the period from 1899 to 1912, when, as one of the two remaining members of the five-strong team assembled in the early months of 1898, she roamed the world extensively, adding considerably to the body of social, political and geographic information here contained. For the convenience of the reader we have here compiled the information found within the various documents into a single commentary that will proceed through various areas of the globe in turn, commencing with our British Isles, and, in our subsequent editions, moving on to deal with Europe, the Americas, Asia and Africa, and finally Earth's polar regions. We shall quote the diverse individuals who have contributed to these accounts in cases where we feel that this may be illuminating or appropriate. It is sincerely hoped the reader will enjoy the mental travels that these notes towards a new cartography allow, and be provided with fresh inspirations for forthcoming holidays and outings.

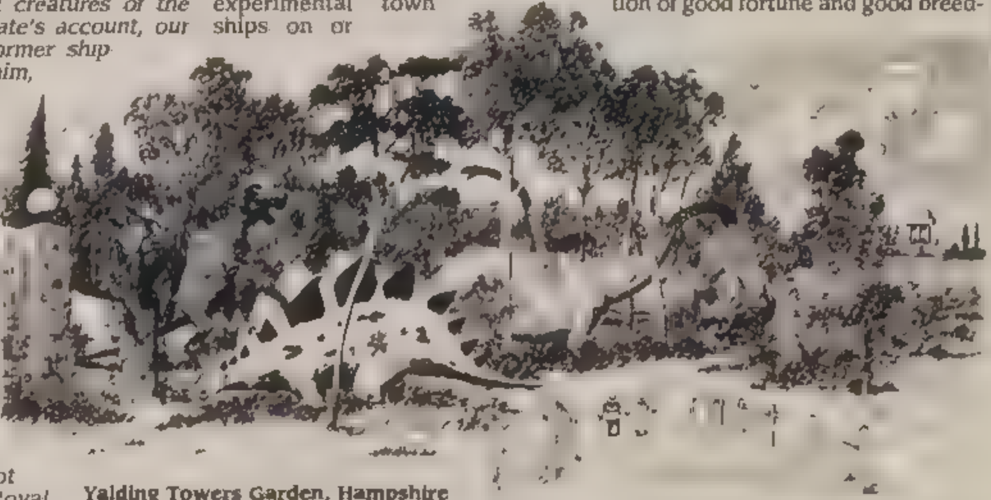
Most sincerely yours, The Editors

Chapter One

The British Isles: From The Streaming Kingdom to The Blazing World

The Streaming Kingdom, in the English Channel, while located closer to the coasts of France than those of England, is included here both as a south-most point from which we may commence our journey, and also due to an account penned in his ship's log by the notorious 18th century pirate, Captain Clegg. For reasons that remain unclear, this infamous and murderous buccaneer had seen fit to entrust the record of his voyages to a pious Kentish clergyman, the Reverend Dr. Syn, who was for reasons equally opaque affiliated to the group directed by Lemuel Gulliver. Clegg's log gives an account of a young pirate crewman drowned while off the coast of France, followed by a reported supernatural visitation:

"Woken at five bells by the mate, with great alarms. The fellow claimed that on his watch he'd seen our young friend lately drowned off Picardy, by some strange means returned to life, and changed so that he swam there in the water with new skin upon him, that would flicker with a hundred little lights of different colours, such as I have seen on cuttlefish and creatures of the like. From the mate's account, our greatly altered former shipmate spoke with him, and told him he was now a subject of The Streaming Kingdom, a domain of underwater gardens and fish-slaves maintained beneath our English Channel, ruled by a mighty regent whose name in our tongue was something not unlike 'His Royal Wetness,' or 'Imperial Liquidity,' or something foolish of that nature. Presuming this to be some manner of delirium or nutmeg vision, had mate flogged before returning to my quarters."


Yalding Towers Garden, Hampshire

Despite the captain's swiftly-reached assumption that his mate had seen this curiously transformed aquatic human while in an intoxicated state, we note that there may be a confirmation of the mate's tale in accounts of the four inch aquatic infants found within the submarine caves of St. Brendan's Isle off Ireland's western coast, concerning which more presently.

The South of England hides a wealth of curious and remarkable locations, both those of antiquity and of more recent times. Most famous are the ruins from the Arthurian period to be found in Cornwall, open to the general public and thus relatively widely known. Of less celebrity is the concealed cave in the cliffs just east of Helston, where it is believed that Arthur's mentor Merlin was incarcerated by his rival thaumaturge, the sorceress Nyneve. There are conflicting claims regarding the true nature of the cave: the French authorities claim to possess the mummified remains of Merlin, found inside an oak somewhere in Brittany, believed to be the prior location of Broceliande Forest. English experts on Arthurian period design have pointed to the cave's many peculiar features (the bronze door with its ivory and cedar bars, the perfectly round chamber with its grass-green marble floor, the carved rock-crystal bed that is the chamber's centrepiece), and have suggested that the cave is, rather than the tomb of Merlin, the retreat used by the famous lovers Tristan and Isolde when they were banished from the court of Cornwall by the jealous rage of Isolde's husband, Mark. If this is so, then possibly the relics found in Brittany are the remains of Merlin after all, unless the final resting place of the near-legendary magician lies in some other, as yet undiscovered, Cornish cavern.

From the ancient to the relatively modern, there are two experimental townships on or near England's south coast. Most well known is Victoria, a small model community established in the 1840s at a cost of some four million pounds, not far from Bournemouth. Built conforming to a perfect square with sides each one mile long, the model town has broad and sweeping avenues designed to limit the secluded urban corners in which vice might thrive, Victoria having been conceived upon a stringent moral and religious basis with exclusion as the strictly enforced punishment for all infringements. For example, if marriage in Victoria should terminate with a divorce then both of the offending couple are immediately expelled, as is the minister who was presiding at their wedding and the congregation that were present at the same.

While this may seem unduly strict to modern sensibilities, it may be useful to compare Victoria with the model town established further north as recently as 1899, in Avondale, not far from Warwick. The United Avondale Phalanstery, while founded on idealist and communal grounds for the improvement of humanity would, to this latter end, painlessly put to death all children born deformed or crippled in the province. Although officially these practices were halted by new laws imposed in late 1907, there is evidence that Avondale and other similar phalansteries continued culling less than satisfactory infants until 1912.

Much more accommodating and benevolent, if more difficult to find, is the delightful village known as Commutaria, established on the Portsmouth Waterloo line just past Haslemere. Founded, allegedly, by a remote descendant of the aforementioned Cornish sorcerer Merlin, Commutaria has been described by various rail passengers who've made unscheduled stops there as the very acme of conviviality. The village seems to have a micro-climate of its own, enjoying weather more predictable and pleasant than elsewhere in Britain. It is also said that life in Commutaria seems, presumably by some chance combination of good fortune and good breeding, to be more simply and continuously agreeable than life in other shires. Upon the breeze are constant scents of Sunday roasts or fresh-baked bread, and every hostelry rewards the seeker with whatever he or she desires: a roaring log fire, possibly, or an enthralling tome by Dornford Yates one hasn't read yet. The only drawback to the place would seem to be its geographical uncertainty. As one wistful and disappointed former visitant has put it, "It isn't always there." This odd, elusive quality perhaps connects the village with more sinister evasive sites, like Abaton in Scotland, or even the mind-warping horrors of "Snark Island," both discussed below.

The South of England, obviously, is also famous for its many architec tural curiosities and follies, its stately homes and legend-haunted cottages. From bleak, magnificent Baskerville Hall out in the wilds of Dartmoor, to Crotchet Castle there in the Thames Valley with its several dozen statues of the goddess Venus, every type of dwelling place is represented. At Yalding Towers, near Liddlesby in Hampshire, one may marvel at stone prehistoric animals concealed within the shrubbery, while at Ravenal's Tower outside Ivybridge in Kent is the perplexing tomb of Richard Ravenal (1720-1779), said to have been cursed so that he could be buried neither by earth nor sea. Ravenal's body thus resides in an octagonal room halfway up his tower. If one should choose to visit Ivybridge and Ravenal's resting place, then nearby Rochester will certainly reward a visit. On its outskirts stands an isolated cottage called "The White House," bordering a gravel pit where there have been reported sightings of a stalk-eyed monster known to the locals as a Psammead, or sand-fairy.

Miss A. L., 1871

Alternatively, travellers may gravitate to the more rural areas of Sussex. Wilhelmina Murray, in 1904, visited (for reasons best known to herself) an elderly bee-keeper who resided near the seaside cove of Fulworth. While in Sussex, it appears Miss Murray also made investigations that concerned folklore surrounding the "Wish House" at 14 Wadloes Road in Smalldene, where it was believed that spectral presences afforded opportunities for selfless folk to take upon themselves the sufferings of loved ones. Making her enquiries, Murray was referred to the Starkadder family farm, not far from Smalldene, where a Starkadder relative, Miss Ada Doom, was rumoured to have recently encountered some form of distressing apparition in a woodshed. We quote here from Wilhelmina's journal notes upon the subject:

"The farm was hideous, and its inhabitants quite clearly interbred or mad or both. I did my best to question Miss Doom and to ascertain if the phenomenon which she'd encountered in the shed could be related to the spectral footsteps evidently heard at Wadloes Road, but I could get no sense out of the woman, who in any case was wretchedly afflicted by the most impenetrable Sussex accent. All the cattle on the farm appeared to be diseased, and I am certain I saw cows with one or more legs simply fallen off. Made my excuses and departed with all haste. What all these dreadful rustic people need is someone sensible and well brought-up to come and sort them out."

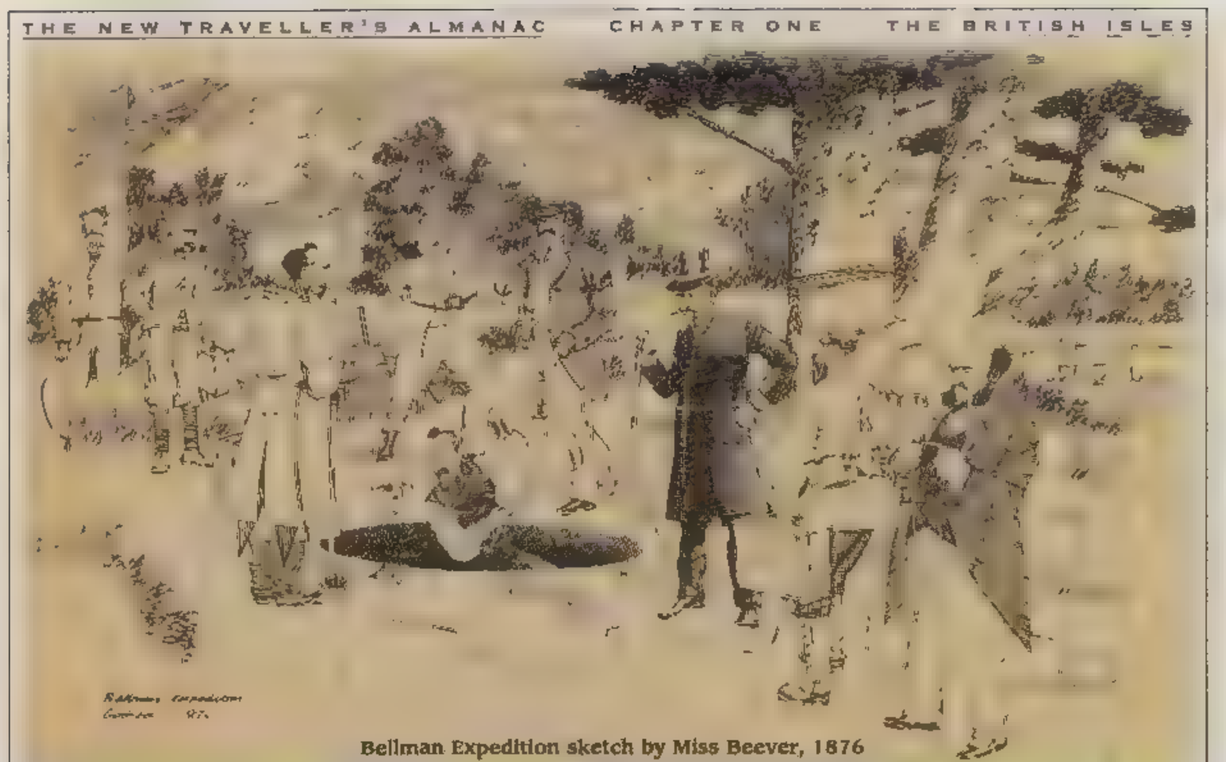
As we move northward up the country, to the west the hills of Wales seem crammed with mysteries and marvels almost beyond counting. Many notable Arthurian-era sites are here, most splendid being the remarkable City of Legions in Glamorganshire, where parts of the city's two churches and its college of astronomy are still unusually intact, given their venerable age. One of the most peculiar Arthurian ruins to be found in Wales, at Archenfield, is Amr's Tomb, allegedly the resting place of Arthur's son, Amr, slain by the King for reasons no longer entirely clear. The most bewildering aspect to the tomb is in the mutability of its construction. In common with other peculiar structures that we shall encounter elsewhere in the world (such as the so-called "Witch House" to be found on Pickman Street in Arkham, Massachusetts), the geometry and the dimensions of the tomb seem to be flexible, so that its length, when measured, has been known to vary between six and fifteen feet within a single twenty-four hour period. This varying of space and distance may have a connection with another Welsh phenomenon, the castle known as Yspaddaden Penkawr which appears to get further away the closer one approaches. Also worth a visit while in Archenfield is nearby Anchester, where one may shudder at the gloomy but imposing sight of Exham Priory, with its dismal history of ineffectual pest-control, as its dark bulk rears into view through the inevitable rain.

Travelling to the east coast out of Wales (perhaps taking a train from the small but friendly railway station found in Llaregyb, close to the River Dewi) one finds that there's comparatively little to remark upon in England's most easterly reaches save for the great national embarrassment, since its discovery in 1673 by Captain Robert Owemuch, of the floating island Scoti Moria, alternatively known as Summer Island. Most usually located in the wide Thames-Isis gulf about a mile southeast of Clacton, Scoti Moria is noted only for its powers of mobility and for the shameful indolence and sloth displayed by its inhabitants. Referring to themselves as Naiads, these incorrigible wastrels have simply not bothered to discover agriculture or, indeed, any pursuit involving labour whatsoever. In its stead, their lives would seem entirely centred upon sprawling around smoking, interrupted only by frequent but unduly noisy games of ninepins.

It is in the middle of the country that we come across some of Great Britain's more enduring riddles. Not far from Bedegraine Forest lies the picturesque and world-famed English university town of Camford, which most recently achieved some notoriety due to the efforts of Professor Presbury who held the chair in the university's department of Comparative Anatomy, and was engaged in a much publicised attempt to manufacture a rejuvenating serum using biological materials obtained from monkeys. Also notable while passing through this charming town is Fergus Castle, raised on a small island in the River Cam. Allegedly, this was the site where Arthur's knight Sir Marhalt slew the giant Taulurd and the castle to this day remains a light and airy structure, unencumbered by the dour fortifications seen at other fortresses, these made unnecessary by the natural moat provided by the River Cam itself.

It is in nearby Oxford, though, that middle England's mysteries take on a darker hue. It was here, on the River Thames's banks somewhere between Godstow and Folly Bridge in 1865 that the presumed abduction of a little girl took place, plunging the Nation's newspapers into a morbid speculative frenzy and immersing Oxford in a pall of fearful gloom unrivalled till the much more frequent child abductions, rapes and murders of the twentieth century. The girl in question, sensitively known as "Miss A. L." to the contemporary press so as to spare the feelings of her relatives, had last been seen at play upon the riverbanks, where she was being minded by an elder sister. To her subsequent unending guilt and shame, the older girl drifted off to sleep, lulled by the warm and pleasant afternoon, awakening soon after to discover her young sister gone.

During the next four months, the riverbank and its surrounding area were searched with an increasing sense of hopelessness by the police and members of the public. Finally,



Bellman Expedition sketch by Miss Beever, 1876

in mid October when the abductee's despairing family had begun funeral arrangements for their missing child, the girl was found alive, discovered soaking wet and barely conscious, suffering from exposure in the very meadow she had vanished from the previous summer. Questioned after her recovery, the girl recounted how she'd fallen down a puzzling "hole" that she'd found in the riverbank, only to find herself in a disorienting realm where many laws of physics, even laws of logic, were entirely different from those laws in our own world. Miss A. L. was most astonished to learn that some months had passed since she had vanished, having up until that point believed that her adventures had all taken place during a single timeless afternoon.

Although the child recovered, there were two less happily-concluded sequels to her exploits, the first taking place in 1871 when Miss A. L. was once more taken into the bewildering territory that she had discovered, this time during the occasion of a family visit to the Deanery of Christ Church College, Oxford. If we are to believe Miss A. L.'s account, the mirror set above the mantel in the Deanery began displaying properties not utterly dissimilar from those of the peculiar hole she'd stumbled into six years previous, allowing her to pass once more into the contra-rational underworld that she'd described. This time, although the time spent in the other world seemed to the child much longer in duration, little more than seven minutes had elapsed before she re-emerged from the strange portal flickering above the mantelpiece, which closed not long thereafter. However, in this instance there were complications. The child's hair-parting was now worn on the other side, and on examination it appeared that the positions of the organs in her body had been quite reversed. Apparently in consequence of this, Miss A. L. could no longer keep down or digest her normal food, and in late November of that year was weakened unto death by this disorder.

There was still, however, one more tragedy to come. In the five years that followed Miss A. L.'s demise, there was much shocked and disapproving talk in Oxford of the possibility that the original "hole" that claimed the luckless child might still be yawning open somewhere on the river's banks, waiting to waylay some other hapless infant. Finally, it was resolved by a committee of the town's professionals that this strange, fatal aperture should be located and explored, with the intention of then sealing it forever to protect the area's young. An Oxford clergyman named Dr. Eric Bellman let the group, accompanied by an assortment of locals including a banker, a lawyer, various shopkeepers (a butcher, and a lacemaker, Miss Beever, the expedition's only female member) and a shoeshine vendor who, while from the working classes, had some military experience and was thus considered useful to the team.

It was in April, 1876, that Bellman's group located the peculiar hole, perhaps a mile from Godstow, where the small girl had initially vanished from our world of rationality almost eleven years before. The "hole," described by Bellman in his notes and in the ink-and pencil drawings of Miss Beever, was a *"darkly luminescent disk some five feet in diameter. It leads not down into the earth as one might readily suppose, but is a type of well-like space in which, much further down, it would seem various objects float suspended."* Bellman further notes that this bewildering aperture seemed to sometimes vanish for irregular periods of time, then reappear for stretches just as random and as unpredictable. On April 23rd, all roped together in the style of mountaineers, the party made their long prepared descent into the chasm. Three hours after the commencement of the expedition, the strange portal vanished, leaving an unnaturally clean-cut end of rope that Bellman's group had fastened to a nearby cedar as an anchor. The explorers were not seen again for seven months, all save for one who was not seen again at all.

In October of that same year, most of Bellman's group were discovered semi conscious, soaking wet and suffering from exposure in the same place that the missing child had been discovered, more than a decade before. All of them were hopelessly insane. One of them, more horribly, had suffered an incomprehensible metamorphosis, so that he seemed to be almost a photographic negative, relative to his previous appearance. His skin was now an eerie, unreflective black, while his formerly black hair and even the black fabric of his waistcoat had been turned a ghastly white. (Like Miss A. L., this individual could no longer digest our world's food, and died within a week of his return.) It seemed the group had kept a journal of their travels, but upon inspection this turned out to have been written in the form of cryptic nonsense poetry. Only infrequent references within this text suggest that the group had visited the same world as the twice transported child, such as the mention of a form of local fauna called a "jub-jub" that is mentioned in both the accounts of Miss A. L. and Eric Bellman's hopelessly deranged adventurers.

The Oxford baker who'd accompanied the expedition was not with the group when they were found, nor was his body subsequently recovered. Reverend Bellman could not give a clear account of what had happened to the man, nor could his team's other surviving members. For some weeks there was hot debate as to whether the Reverend and his fellows should be tried for murder, but at last it was decided that their mental states made them unfit to plead and they were quietly incarcerated in a nearby mental institution. In 1901, Miss Wilhelmina Murray visited the institution, interviewing Eric Bellman who by then was the sole member of the expedition twenty-five years earlier that still remained alive, a frail man in his early eighties. Her recorded comments follow.

"Visited the Reverend Dr. Bellman at the hospital this evening. Most distressing. The poor man cannot complete a sentence without wandering off into disjointed wordplay or delirious flights of fancy. As I had been instructed by our chubby taskmaster, I questioned Bellman closely on his expedition to the place that his demented journal notes refer to as 'Snark Island.' It was useless. Asked how one might find this place, Bellman grew agitated and snatched up a page out of my notebook, claiming that it was a perfect map of how the island might be reached. The page in question, I should note, was yet unused and thus entirely blank.

"When I brought up the subject of the missing baker, Mr. Eric Bellman grew sombre and, it seemed to me, evasive. He would only say 'The last word that he spoke was "boo."' I left the hospital a little under two hours later having managed to elicit no more information from this tragic, tortured individual. For reasons that are presently obscure to me, I kept the featureless blank 'map' that Bellman had torn from my notebook, and I find that I keep staring at it as I write these words. Why does it fill me with .unease? No. That is not the word. Dread. Why does this blank leaf fill me with dread?"

Marginalia and footnotes from the primary documents of which this compilation is comprised suggest that Military Intelligence Group Five placed great importance on the realm that Bellman's group and Miss A. L. had visited. One note suggests that there may be connections between this strange world and its bizarre inhabitants and certain tunnels found beneath an island in East Anglia, at Winton Pond. Other jottings, in a different hand, put forward the hypothesis that whatever exists beyond the Oxford hole is not some other-worldly plane, but is entirely a terrestrial phenomenon, perhaps a subterranean extension of Coal City, Vril-ya Country or the Roman State, underworld kingdoms that we shall encounter further north.

Indeed, while there stands the occasional stately home with its surrounding legends (like Harthover Place in Yorkshire with its possible connection to the marine infant carcasses discovered at St. Brendan's Isle; or Nightmare Abbey on the edge of Lincolnshire, a place so cursed that its afflictions almost seem amusing), the majority of Northern England's sites of interest would seem to have a subterranean aspect. Alderly Edge, a windswept and remote location in the hills of Cheshire, is reputed to conceal the entrance to a massive cave containing scores of mediaeval knights in some state of suspended animation. Other underground inhabitants of a less reassuring nature are suggested by the yawning pit or bore-hole found amongst the ancient ruins of Diana's Grove in Staffordshire, not far from Mercy Farm and the nearby ancestral pile of Castra Regis, home to the illustrious Caswell family until the sad events of their *annus horribilus* in 1911, the details of which, widely reported at the time by the contemporary press, need no repeating here.

However, it is not until we come to Newcastle that the extent of the vast subterranean honeycomb that lies beneath our surface world becomes apparent. It was in Newcastle, in 1871, that an intended rescue mission into one of the proverbially coal-bearing area's many mines (exact location classified) stumbled upon a vast and otherworldly subterranean culture called the Vril-ya. Tall and winged with red skin and black eyes, the Vril-ya are a socially enlightened race of great longevity. According to reports they can heal wounds or cure an illness with the mere touch their lips.. quite literally "kissing it better" ..and they have artificial servants, cleverly constructed from machinery, attending to their every whim. One puzzling margin note appended to the documents relating to the Vril-ya is a comment on their language. In the Vril-ya tongue, words with the prefix *Na* denote all that is "bad" or antithetical to joy and wholesomeness. Thus *"Nania"* is a Vril-ya word denoting sin, or evil. This word is underlined in our source-documents, and a handwritten note refers the reader to an apple-tree currently being grown as a government project at Kew Gardens. Other than an obvious misspelling of the Vril-ya word as "Narnia?" scrawled in nearby, we have no clue as to the relevance, if any, of these cryptic jottings.

Bordering the lands of the Vril-ya (and thus also somewhere beneath the North of England), across one of their subterranean seas, there have been relics found pertaining to a settlement comprising a lost Roman legion and their numerous descendants. Of this so-called "Roman State," little is known as of this writing, but it is suggested that it may be situated between the vast territories of the Vril-ya and the twilight structures of Coal City under Scotland, presently to be discussed.

Before we leave the North of England, though, and journey to the shores of Ireland, there is one location that we must take care not to exclude: up in Northumberland, upon the North Sea coast, stands Bamburgh Castle, a rectangular stone keep erected circa 1160 A.D. on the ruins of a pre-existing castle, a Dark Ages structure built around the year 500 A.D. From pieces of this earlier structure used when raising Bamburgh Castle during the great Norman castle-building era, we can deduce that it had, itself, been constructed utilising terracotta shards belonging to an earlier Roman period domicile. This, then, was Joyeusegarde, the fortress raised directly after the Roman withdrawal from these shores in the fifth century, where Launcelot of Camelot lived in adultery with Arthur's wife Guinevere. After his King's death at Mordred's hands on Salisbury Plain, the guilt-plagued hero starved himself to death, requesting that his body be returned to Joyeusegarde, where it was placed in the sixth-century tomb erected on the grounds. Set thus apart from the main castle, it was spared the Norman renovations and still stands as of this present day, though in a state of grievous disrepair. Within our borrowed files are records of two separate visits to the tomb, and a comparison between the two may prove instructive.

The first was penned by Prospero, Duke of Milan, as his group worked their way up country on their expedition to The Blazing World in 1682, calling at Joyeusegarde to see the tomb and pay respects to the Arthurian-era hero, the Duke records his great dismay at the dilapidation of the monument: *"The ceiling gapes, collapsed, so that an oar of sunlight falls across this vault and stripes the carven form at rest on his sarcophagus. The elements and keepsake hunters both have scoured its features with unkindness, so that little save a weathered granite knob remains to represent the nobel countenance, and many details of his armour and effects are likewise rendered indistinct. The dogs curled at his feet are mostly disappeared, with one a formless lump, the other nothing save a paw. Ah, ill made knight, that thy unmaking should prove more ill yet, with all about thy funeral stones now tumbled into disrepair. The moss encroaches, and men's minds forget the eyes, the brow, his streaming beast-mane hair."*

Compare this with the brief and clearly unimpressed account of Wilhelmina Murray when she visited the tomb in 1912: *"All very nice, I must say. Launcelot is much as I imagined him, clean-cut and handsome, wearing mediaeval armour* *with three greyhounds sleeping at his feet. Other than that, it rained, we had another beastly row, and all in all I shall find our return to London an immense relief."*

It's clear that in the intervening period between these two accounts, the tomb had been restored according to Romantic notions of the hero, rather than with a concern for authenticity. Thus it would seem that through misguided efforts to restore the past, the face of England's greatest champion has been all the more thoroughly lost to us, for all time.

Let us travel now to Ireland, before we progress to Scotland and parts north. It is in rural Ireland that we seem to find phenomena of a more whimsical, fantastic nature, such as Gort Na Cloca Mora, near Glyn Cagny, where a hollow tree apparently grants access to another subterranean kingdom, this one the abode of Leprechauns. In the nearby glen, Glyn Cagny, famed for two philosophers residing there in ancient times, there is a pool wherein dwell a peculiar breed of salmon said to be the most profound and learned creatures in all Ireland. Not far from the glen we find the hidden cave referred to locally as the domain of The Sleepers of Erinn, where Irish god-king Angus Og and his bride Caitlin are believed to now reside.

Also in rural Ireland, some way southeast of Glyn Cagny, we find the Lake of the Cauldron, named for the massive cauldron hauled from its depths by one of the giant race inhabiting that country in its prehistoric past. (Giant-era finds are much more rare in England, an exception being the peculiarly modern-seeming "Giant's Garden" that surrounds an outsized tower near Camford. Unbelievably, these ruins were not discovered until 1888. While their great scale marks them as having been a giant's habitat, historians are puzzled by the recent seeming elements of the design which would appear to date the ruins from the fifteenth century, by which time giants were thought to have been long extinct.) The huge, corroded cauldron still stands on the lake's shore, and, it is alleged, still has the property of bringing back to life any dead man immersed within it. Strangely, persons in this way revived from death are also rendered mute and thus unable to communicate concerning such experience as they may have of life beyond the grave.

Nearer to Dublin, we find Leixlip Castle, an enchanting site with numerous Grecian temples on its grounds. Despite its ease upon the eye, however, Leixlip nurses a dark history. Redmond Blaney was Leixlip's first baron-tenant, and it was his daughter Jane who seemingly fell foul of the strange castle's curse during the eighteenth century, when she disappeared at the conclusion of an idle stroll through Leixlip's terraced grounds. Jane Blaney is still seen, however, looking cold and famished, as an apparition sometimes glimpsed out of the corner of the eye by visitors when passing through the castle's kitchens.

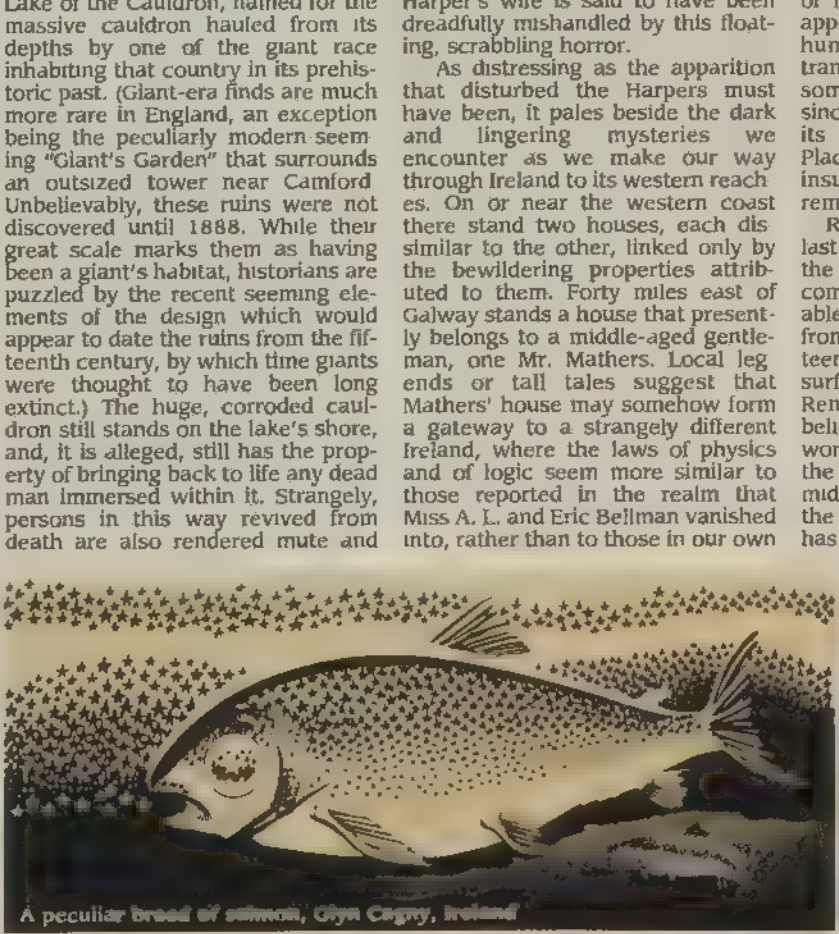
In Dublin itself we find an unrelated case of haunting (besides that of the famous spectral seafood vendor, Miss Malone) that pertains to a demolished eighteenth century building in the centre of the city, once known as "The Red House" for the striking redness of the tiles that formed its roof. The building's owner, Mr. Harper, had his house demolished in the early 1860s when he grew disturbed by a peculiar disembodied hand that floated in the night outside his dwelling, seeking entrance. Though unverified, it is reported that the final straw came when the hand managed to invade a bedroom on the second floor, where Harper's wife is said to have been dreadfully mishandled by this floating, scrabbling horror.

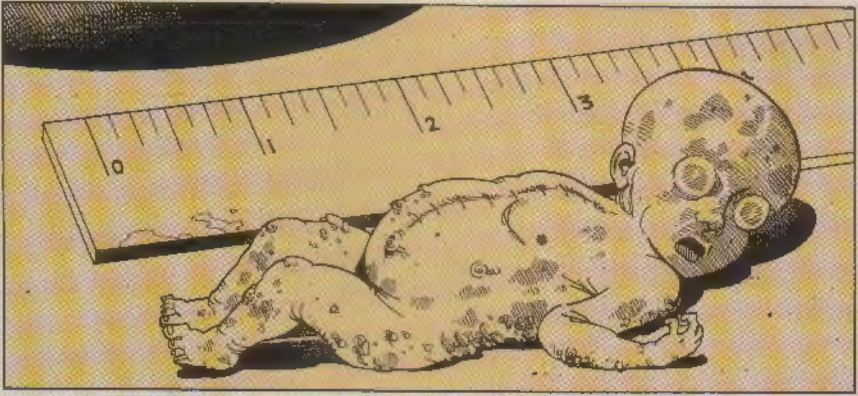
As distressing as the apparition that disturbed the Harpers must have been, it pales beside the dark and lingering mysteries we encounter as we make our way through Ireland to its western reaches. On or near the western coast there stand two houses, each dissimilar to the other, linked only by the bewildering properties attributed to them. Forty miles east of Galway stands a house that presently belongs to a middle-aged gentleman, one Mr. Mathers. Local legends or tall tales suggest that Mathers' house may somehow form a gateway to a strangely different Ireland, where the laws of physics and of logic seem more similar to those reported in the realm that Miss A. L. and Eric Bellman vanished into, rather than to those in our own world.

Even more alarming than the Mathers house are the unearthly ruins we discover on the windswept western coast of Ireland. These apparently once formed a house built on a wild crag jutting out above a chasm, where lived a half-mad recluse, alone save for his dog and for a silent, haunted-looking sister. Sodden, faded notebooks found amongst the ruins by travellers in the first decade of the twentieth century hint that the house was somehow situated on a borderland between our own world and another, but a world even more terrifying and apocalyptic than the realm to which the nearby Mathers house is said to provide entrance to.

Some way off Ireland's western coast we reach the island known as that of Saint Brendan the Blessed. An impressive sight, the island rears up from the North Atlantic on great pillars of black basalt streaked with serpentine or sandstone in a startling display of colours. While astonishing in its own right, the island is made more remarkable and worthy of attention by discoveries made in the 1860s of a strange form of marine life to be found within the massive caves beneath the isle. Explorers in the caves have been excited to discover the brine-pickled bodies of what seem to be some water-breathing form of tiny humanoid, all of the specimens thus far retrieved being four inches long or less, and in their colouring and appearance not at all unlike small human children that have been transformed to perfect miniatures by some fantastic method. Rumour, since the 1860s, links the island and its curious fauna with Harthover Place in Yorkshire, but the linkage, insufficiently investigated, still remains obscure.

Returning now to Scotland for the last stretch of our journey through the British Isles, we should first comment on Coal City, the remarkable underground world extending from the New Aberfoyle caverns, fifteen hundred feet beneath Earth's surface, sprawling under Stirling, Renfrew and Dumbarton and believed to link up with the cave-world of the Roman State a little to the south. Set up by miners in the middle of the nineteenth century, the architecture of the settlement has been justly described as "staggering," from its proud castellated entrance to its chapel of St. Giles that rears above Coal City's bordering subterranean loch. Heated and lit by electricity (used to provide Coal City with an artificial "day"), the miners' splendid commune has in recent years drawn as much revenue from tourists as it has from coal production. Would that all such sites of interest to be found in Scotland were as easy to locate. Whether we speak of Abaton, the moving town glimpsed somewhere on the


A peculiar breed of salmon, Glyn Cagny, Ireland



Tiny water-breathing humanoid form, reproduced by kind permission of The Lancet

road from Troon to Glasgow by Sir Thomas Bullfinch in the 1890s, or whether we refer to equally-elusive Brigadoon, a Highland village that seems to have disappeared from the maps on May 22nd, 1753, only to reappear for one day at a time at century-long intervals, we are forced to note the shifting and phantasmal nature that has come to typify the Scottish mystery-site.

True, there are places with a definite and fixed location, such as Airfowlness, on Scotland's western coast where what seem to be courts or parliaments of sea birds are held annually, or Coradine, the fascinating matriarchal settlement up to the north of Scotland so admired by Wilhelmina Murray on her visit there in 1899. Such places pale to insignificance, however, beside the more evasive settlements, such as the place known as The Glittering Plain, which also has a second, secret name, the speaking of which is forbidden, but which is, reputedly, "The Acre of the Undying." Hidden in a coastal Highland valley, entrance to the glen apparently transforms the traveller to an immortal, such as all who dwell within The Glittering Plain (see Wilhelmina Murray's journey to the City of Ayesha out in Africa during 1901), but thus transformed they may not ever leave the valley.

Oddly, there would seem to be connections that exist between The Glittering Plain and a remote isle to the North of Scotland, famous for its wreckers and its pirates, called the Isle of Ransom. The only building on the isle of any note, the Hall of Ravagers, contains a carven likeness that is said to be an image of The Glittering Plain's immortal king. During 1683, Prospero's group called briefly at the Isle of Ransom before passing further northward in their hired trawler on the fateful expedition to The Blazing World, which we must now address.

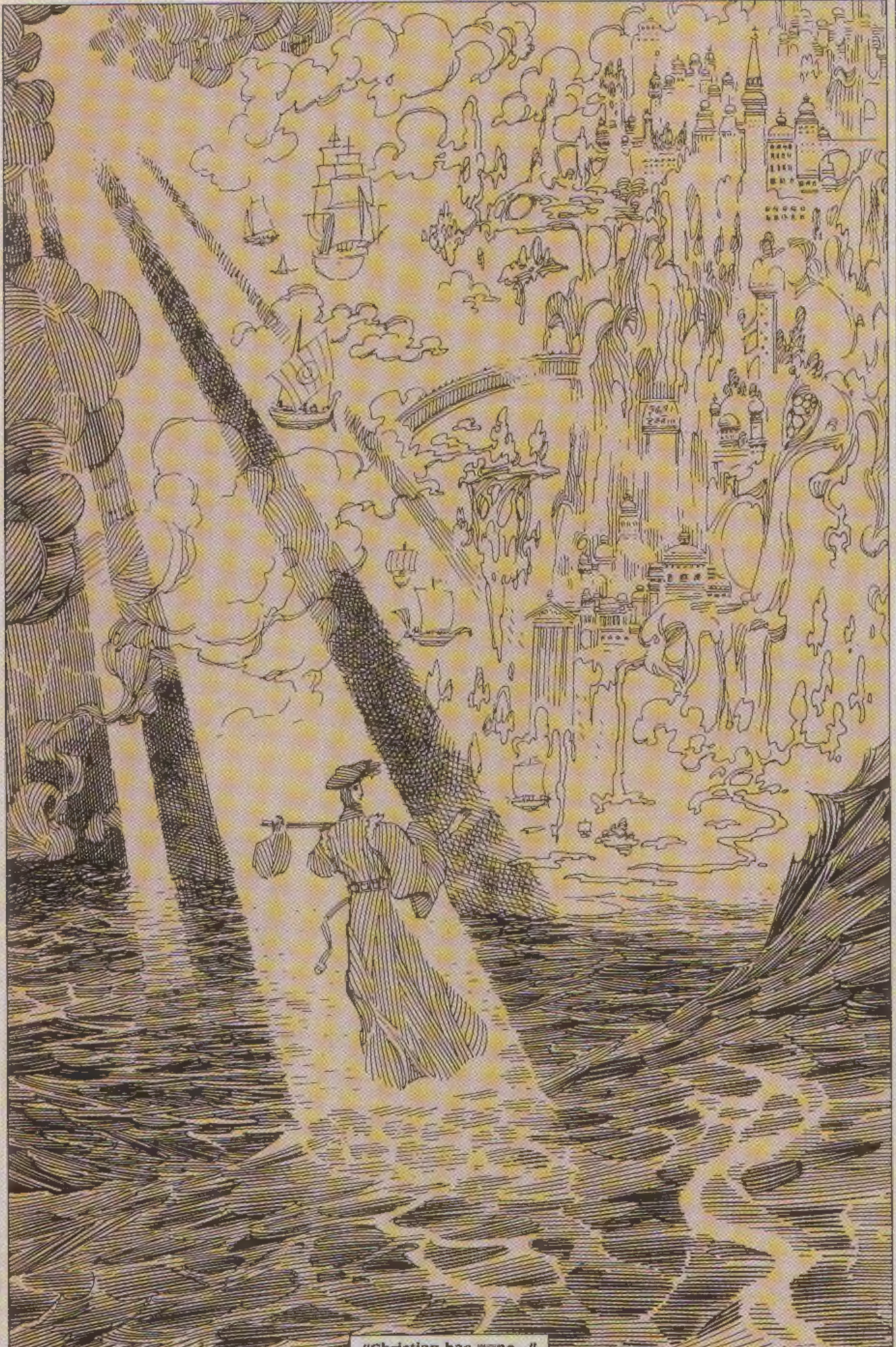
The Blazing World, psychically charted by the Duchess of Newcastle in the fateful year of 1666, is a great archipelago of islands stretching from the North Pole to the outskirts of the British Isles, linked by a great crystal stream bordered to either side by cities made of coral, marble, agate, amber or pale alabaster. The Duchess claimed these structures were inhabited by a variety of different races: bear-men, gruff and philosophical, or fox-men, sly and skilled in politics, along with ape-men, worm-men, lice-men, parrot-men and so on in a profusion that seemed near unending. When Prospero's band reached the archipelago in the harsh January of 1683, they found it had one property at least in common with the shifting and elusive kingdoms of the Scottish Highlands, in that it was not entirely there, in any ordinary sense. Prospero's notes convey the mounting apprehension of his crew as they sail out amongst these insubstantial islands in their rented ship.

"This place confounds my wits, if place it be and no mere sum of intimations, forms half-glimpsed and vistas plainer to Imagination's inner eye, as with the imps seen in a scrying-glass, than to the outer sight. Fantastic battlements of streaked and polished agate loom up vast and intricate upon the eye's peripheries, that turn to grey and endless waves of icy fog when gazed upon direct. Were it not for my conjurings, I should see nothing. Robert Owemuch, who we travel with, claims that he sees naught but the sea and our impending doom. He is anxious and deprived of sleep by the great bellowings of Caliban, who has retired below decks in a state of fearfulness and vows that he shall not emerge until we are brought once more to dry land. The sprite of air, of course, can see The Blazing World quite plainly as it darts excitedly ahead of our frail, wind-tossed craft, reporting to me all that it has viewed. Of all of us, the traveller Christian seems at once the least afraid and yet the most absorbed within himself. He stands and stares across the rail, whipped by the spray, as if he sees enchanted realms where I may not, though this be merest speculation since he speaks no word to me, or any man."

Christian, it will be remembered, had arrived in our world during the 1670s, claiming to come from a more perfect and, it seems, symbolic realm. According to the tireless journeyman's own words, he had been travelling from a city named Destruction when he came across a town founded upon material desires and worldly commerce that was called Vanity Fair. Becoming lost amongst its bawdy, brothel-haunted streets, Christian turned down an alleyway from which he stepped into the streets of London in the year of 1678, seemingly unable to return to his beloved shining country, and thus forced into a disagreeable alliance with the sorcerer Prospero, whose magic, diabolically inspired though it might have been, provided Christian's strongest chance of finding his way home. Whether this came to pass or not may be discovered in our final passage from the notes of Prospero, written upon the voyage's last day before the rented trawler turned once more for home.

"Christian has gone, and frightful mystery descends upon our storm-flung craft. It was at first light when I came upon him stood beside the rail and gazing out across the foam-crown'd breakers. When I asked if he did spy The Blazing World, he answered that he did, and though he knew not if it be a part of his misplaced, beloved country he did think that it may be in some means a companion to that glorious Land. Thus saying, he began to climb across the rail as if to fling himself into the towering waves, so that I sought to stay him, whereupon a fearful marvel did occur. Christian walked off from us, over the wave-tops, with his bundle-staff across his shoulder, seeming from his gait as if he strolled upon some level path and not the raging billows spread about him. Below decks, my brute sent up a monstrous howl of fear and anguish, and even my sprite seemed to dart nervously about the upper mast. Some way off from our craft, Christian turned back his head and waved before continuing away, at last to vanish in the dazzle from the waters, where the sun had broken through the fleece of cloud above, and since that time we have seen none of him. Good pilgrim, fare thee well upon thy bless'd and flint-strewn way, and think thee well alike on one thou once thought foe. Mayhap we'll meet again come that glad day when for thy realm I quit these fields of woe."

Prospero, long in mourning for his child Miranda, Queen of Naples, disappeared in 1695 as did his "brute" and "spirit of the air." It is not known whether this happened (as claimed by the Duke's sometime colleague, Captain Robert Owemuch) during a return trip to The Blazing World. Nor is it known if the magician managed, as had Christian, to step from this world into that weirdly immanent terrain, or if he vanished under the cruel fathoms of the Arctic Ocean, too far from The Streaming Kingdom to be born anew amongst its flooded, lantern-fish illuminated avenues.



"Christian has gone..."

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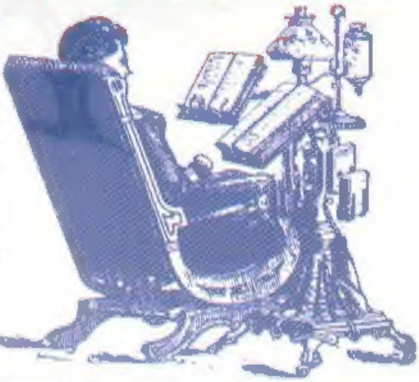

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